# The Gentleman from San Francisco

## and Other Stories

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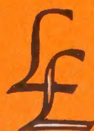
IVAN BUNIN

Nobel Prizewinner for 1933



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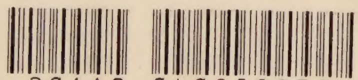

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*The Landmark Library*
*No.* 39

# THE GENTLEMAN FROM SAN FRANCISCO AND OTHER STORIES

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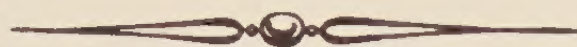
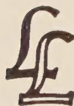
AND OTHER STORIES



Ivan Bunin

*With an Introduction by*
William Sansom

WITHDRAWN



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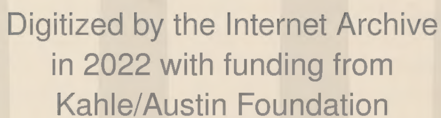
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# INTRODUCTION

Our mouse minds adore elephants. The generally acknowledged masterpieces of the world are mostly huge – the rolling reams of *War and Peace,* the masonic bulk of St Peter's or the Athenian acropolis; Rembrandt's immense *Nightwatch,* of which a few feet were quite equably snipped off to accommodate it to the walls of the Dam palace; the symphonies of Beethoven. All overpower by physical size as well as beauty. Yet bright in their shadows shine sonnets and odes, smaller jewelled architectures, the great little canvases of Breughel – all 'little' masterpieces that soar far above so cosy an epithet, as surely do the short works of Ivan Alexeyvitch Bunin, whose poetic and carefully economic prose has too often struck the unwary as 'sketchy'. To these one might whisper that Leonardo sketched pretty nicely, too.

Bunin was born in Voronezh in 1870, a year before Proust was born; but lived on, exiled from Russia, as Proust was exiled from youth, until 1953. Like Proust, he deals with the past and the sensuous reconstitution of memory; most of his short stories were written in France, dreaming back on a beloved *belle époque* scythed from him by revolution, and recounting in their plot parallel essences of his own experience. How astounding life once was, how inexorably can Fate come to end it all for ever! Unlike Proust his manner is not explicit; he lets a simple framework of facts and feeling speak for itself, little explanation necessary, showing once again that with many writers it can be what is *not* written that makes literature.

Bunin came from a noble family with country estates

and poetic antecedents. His stories are written from the viewpoint of a moneyed and cultured man – though, as with many of his acquaintances from the elderly Leo Tolstoy to Chekhov, he felt deeply for the brutal schism between aristocrat and peasant; and in extenuation, the brutality of the human condition itself. In this latter respect, the fatal processes of Greek tragedy provided one of his most chilling techniques: after his story is told – more often than not a tale of erotic love with undertones of guilt or the tempting of fate – Fate indeed strikes, many months after the story is told, in a single line or paragraph recounting the sudden death or disastrous future of hero or heroine. Thus: 'In December she died in Geneva after premature childbirth.' Or: 'That was in February of the terrible year, 1917. He was staying there in the country for the last time in his life.' These are not 'trick' endings; we are brought up with a terrific jolt, dry and real as the sight of a casual news item, and also with a sense of the inevitable passage of real time magnifying so condensed a work, a remarkable extension of intense compression.

Bunin is always sensuous, sometimes sensual, in his close evocation of women's flesh and the rural and urban weathers observed by a late Czarist Russian. The little rosy moles showing between the slightly powdered shoulder-blades of the San Franciscan's daughter, the moles that covered the brown body of mysterious, marshy Roosya, the shady streak of dark down softening the red lips of the student in *Ash Wednesday* – all these and much more are recorded with the same sensuous relish as items of food or drink consumed on the story's premises, never generalized, always succulently named. Brush strokes inseparable from the whole, they build

an intense solidity.

The scent of a cigarette in the country is smelled as 'human' smoke; and, as a gentleman of his time, Bunin is strong on lilacs and gaslight, champagne and women's knees (rounded or dimpled). But one is also abruptly modernized by an electric kettle, and Europeanised in Moscow by 'a small English latch-key', Swedish skis or a Portuguese string orchestra. The enervating steppe and charged doldrums of Turgenev and Chekhov invest a birchy Russian country air – summer days are endless, the months drag by, hearts take a long time to be wrung: but here the vast spaces of time and place are given a strange and potent immediacy, largely, one may think, because they are the very clear visions of exiled memory, life seen reflected as in the mysteriously clear world of mirrors.

Some of Bunin's characters are exceptional, such as his Musa, a lady after Sacher-Masoch's heart, or the food-loving soul-searcher of *Ash Wednesday*; but for the most part he chooses people of a type ordinarily more difficult to deal with, 'ordinary' people in fact – typical young officers, commercial travellers, beautiful young girls, rough peasants, even that multiple coefficient the 'American millionaire'. All are framework types, and left as such the better to express universal emotions. Yet all come most vividly to life. It is the magic of simple *statement*: such-and-such a person drove up to such-and-such a place, both exactly named, and, quite simply, the reader takes them for granted. With very few able brush-strokes of thick pigment – clothes, weather-smells, flesh textures – they are feathered into momentous solidity, there is never even the beginning of disbelief to be suspended. From thereon these characters enact their

tender tragedies: and, by a rare acrobatic, surmount without effort the clichés of what are, for the most part, fairly familiar predicaments of lust and love.

Write down, Bunin seems to say, what exactly *is* there, what *was* there once in the bright world of memory, materially and exactly: and the images will then solidify and move of their own motion, exhaling a nostalgic wonder at the mystery of all life in this world, of both erotic and soulful love, of the strangeness of beauty and the beauty of grief, and, always, of passing time and death.

William Sansom

# THE GENTLEMAN FROM SAN FRANCISCO

"Woe to thee, Babylon, that mighty city!"
APOCALYPSE.

The gentleman from San Francisco—nobody either in Capri or Naples ever remembered his name—was setting out with his wife and daughter for the Old World, to spend there two years of pleasure.

He was fully convinced of his right to rest, to enjoy long and comfortable travels, and so forth. Because, in the first place he was rich, and in the second place, notwithstanding his fifty-eight years, he was just starting to live. Up to the present he had not lived, but only existed; quite well, it is true, yet with all his hopes on the future. He had worked incessantly—and the Chinamen whom he employed by the thousand in his factories knew what that meant. Now at last he realized that a great deal had been accomplished, and that he had almost reached the level of those whom he had taken as his ideals, so he made up his mind to pause for a breathing space. Men of his class usually began their enjoyments with a trip to Europe, India, Egypt. He decided to do the same. He wished naturally to reward himself in the first place for all his years of toil, but he was quite glad that his wife and daughter should also share in his pleasures. True, his wife was not distinguished by any marked susceptibilities, but then elderly American women are

all passionate travellers. As for his daughter, a girl no longer young and somewhat delicate, travel was really necessary for her: apart from the question of health, do not happy meetings often take place in the course of travel? One may find one's self sitting next to a multi-millionaire at table, or examining frescoes side by side with him.

The itinerary planned by the Gentleman of San Francisco was extensive. In December and January he hoped to enjoy the sun of southern Italy, the monuments of antiquity, the tarantella, the serenades of vagrant minstrels, and, finally, that which men of his age are most susceptible to, the love of quite young Neapolitan girls, even when the love is not altogether disinterestedly given. Carnival he thought of spending in Nice, in Monte Carlo, where at that season gathers the most select society, the precise society on which depend all the blessings of civilization—the fashion in evening dress, the stability of thrones, the declaration of wars, the prosperity of hotels; where some devote themselves passionately to automobile and boat races, others to roulette, others to what is called flirtation, and others to the shooting of pigeons which beautifully soar from their traps over emerald lawns, against a background of forget-me-not sea, instantly to fall, hitting the ground in little white heaps. The beginning of March he wished to devote to Florence, Passion Week in Rome, to hear the music of the Miserere; his plans also included Venice, Paris, bull-fights in Seville, bathing in the British Isles; then Athens, Constantinople, Egypt, even Japan . . . certainly on his way home. . . . And everything at the outset went splendidly.

It was the end of November. Practically all the way

to Gibraltar the voyage passed in icy darkness, varied by storms of wet snow. Yet the ship travelled well, even without much rolling. The passengers on board were many, and all people of some importance. The boat, the famous *Atlantis,* resembled a most expensive European hotel with all modern equipments: a night refreshment bar, Turkish baths, a newspaper printed on board; so that the days aboard the liner passed in the most select manner. The passengers rose early, to the sound of bugles sounding shrilly through the corridors in that grey twilit hour, when day was breaking slowly and sullenly over the grey-green, watery desert, which rolled heavily in the fog. Clad in their flannel pyjamas, the gentlemen took coffee, chocolate, or cocoa, then seated themselves in marble baths, did exercises, thereby whetting their appetite and their sense of well-being, made their toilet for the day, and proceeded to breakfast. Till eleven o'clock they were supposed to stroll cheerfully on deck, breathing the cold freshness of the ocean; or they played table-tennis or other games, that they might have an appetite for their eleven o'clock refreshment of sandwiches and bouillon; after which they read their newspaper with pleasure, and calmly awaited luncheon—which was a still more varied and nourishing meal than breakfast. The two hours which followed luncheon were devoted to rest. All the decks were crowded with lounge chairs on which lay passengers wrapped in plaids, looking at the mist-heavy sky or the foamy hillocks which flashed behind the bows, and dozing sweetly. Till five o'clock, when, refreshed and lively, they were treated to strong, fragrant tea and sweet cakes. At seven bugle-calls announced a dinner of nine courses. And now the Gentleman from San Francisco, rubbing his hands in a rising flush

of vital forces, hastened to his state cabin to dress.

In the evening, the tiers of the *Atlantis* yawned in the darkness as with innumerable fiery eyes, and a multitude of servants in the kitchens, sculleries, wine-cellars, worked with a special frenzy. The ocean heaving beyond was terrible, but no one thought of it, firmly believing in the captain's power over it. The captain was a ginger-haired man of monstrous size and weight, apparently always torpid, who looked in his uniform with broad gold stripes very like a huge idol, and who rarely emerged from his mysterious chambers to show himself to the passengers. Every minute the siren howled from the bows with hellish moroseness, and screamed with fury, but few diners heard it–it was drowned by the sounds of an excellent string band, exquisitely and untiringly playing in the huge two-tiered hall that was decorated with marble and covered with velvet carpets, flooded with feasts of light from crystal chandeliers and gilded girandoles, and crowded with ladies in bare shoulders and jewels, with men in dinner-jackets, elegant waiters and respectful *maitres d' hotel*, one of whom, he who took the wine-orders only, wore a chain round his neck like a lord mayor. Dinner-jacket and perfect linen made the Gentleman from San Francisco look much younger. Dry, of small stature, badly built but strongly made, polished to a glow and in due measure animated, he sat in the golden-pearly radiance of this palace, with a bottle of amber Johannisberg at his hand, and glasses, large and small, of delicate crystal, and a curly bunch of fresh hyacinths. There was something Mongolian in his yellowish face with its trimmed silvery moustache, large teeth blazing with gold, and strong bald head blazing like old ivory. Richly dressed, but in

keeping with her age, sat his wife, a big, broad, quiet woman. Intricately, but lightly and transparently dressed, with an innocent immodesty, sat his daughter, tall, slim, her magnificent hair splendidly done, her breath fragrant with violet cachous, and the tenderest little rosy moles showing near her lip and between her bare, slightly powdered shoulder-blades. The dinner lasted two whole hours, to be followed by dancing in the ball-room, whence the men, including, of course, the Gentleman from San Francisco, proceeded to the bar; there, with their feet cocked up on the tables, they settled the destinies of nations in the course of their political and stock-exchange conversations, smoking meanwhile Havana cigars and drinking liqueurs till they were crimson in the face, waited on all the while by negroes in red jackets with eyes like peeled, hard-boiled eggs. Outside, the ocean heaved in black mountains; the snow-storm hissed furiously in the clogged cordage; the steamer trembled in every fibre as she surmounted these watery hills and struggled with the storm, ploughing through the moving masses which every now and then reared in front of her, foam-crested. The siren, choked by the fog, groaned in mortal anguish. The watchmen in the look-out towers froze with cold, and went mad with their super-human straining of attention. As the gloomy and sultry depths of the inferno, as the ninth circle, was the submerged womb of the steamer, where gigantic furnaces roared and dully giggled, devouring with their red-hot maws mountains of coal cast hoarsely in by men naked to the waist, bathed in their own corrosive dirty sweat, and lurid with the purple-red reflection of flame. But in the refreshment bar men jauntily put their feet up on the tables, showing their patent-leather pumps, and sipped

cognac or other liqueurs, and swam in waves of fragrant smoke as they chatted in well-bred manner. In the dancing hall light and warmth and joy were poured over everything; couples turned in the waltz or writhed in the tango, while the music insistently, shamelessly, delightfully, with sadness entreated for one, only one thing, one and the same thing all the time. Amongst this resplendent crowd was an ambassador, a little dry modest old man; a great millionaire, clean-shaven, tall, of an indefinite age, looking like a prelate in his old-fashioned dress-coat; also a famous Spanish author, and an international beauty already the least bit faded, of unenviable reputation; finally an exquisite loving couple, whom everybody watched curiously because of their unconcealed happiness: *he* danced only with *her,* and sang, with great skill, only to *her* accompaniment, and everything about them seemed so charming!—and only the captain knew that this couple had been engaged by the steamship company to play at love for a good salary, and that they had been sailing for a long time, now on one liner, now on another.

At Gibraltar the sun gladdened them all: it was like early spring. A new passenger appeared on board, arousing general interest. He was a hereditary prince of a certain Asiatic state, travelling incognito: a small man, as if all made of wood, though his movements were alert; broad-faced, in gold-rimmed glasses, a little unpleasant because of his large black moustache which was sparse and transparent like that of a corpse; but on the whole inoffensive, simple, modest. In the Mediterranean they met once more the breath of winter. Waves, large and florid as the tail of a peacock, waves with snow-white crests heaved under the impulse of the tramontane wind,

and came merrily, madly rushing towards the ship, in the bright lustre of a perfectly clear sky. The next day the sky began to pale, the horizon grew dim, land was approaching: Ischia, Capri could be seen through the glasses, then Naples herself, looking like pieces of sugar strewn at the foot of some dove-coloured mass; whilst beyond, vague and deadly white with snow, a range of distant mountains. The decks were crowded. Many ladies and gentlemen were putting on light fur-trimmed coats. Noiseless Chinese servant boys, bandy-legged, with pitch-black plaits hanging down to their heels, and with girlish thick eyebrows, unobtrusively came and went, carrying up the stairways plaids, canes, valises, hand-bags of crocodile leather, and never speaking above a whisper. The daughter of the Gentleman from San Francisco stood side by side with the prince, who, by a happy circumstance, had been introduced to her the previous evening. She had the air of one looking fixedly into the distance towards something which he was pointing out to her, and which he was explaining hurriedly, in a low voice. Owing to his size, he looked amongst the rest like a boy. Altogether he was not handsome, rather queer, with his spectacles, bowler hat, and English coat, and then the hair of his sparse moustache just like horse-hair, and the swarthy, thin skin of his face seeming stretched over his features and slightly varnished. But the girl listened to him, and was so excited that she did not know what he was saying. Her heart beat with incomprehensible rapture because of him, because he was standing next to her and talking to her, to her alone. Everything, everything about him was so unusual—his dry hands, his clean skin under which flowed ancient, royal blood, even his plain, but somehow

particularly tidy European dress; everything was invested with an indefinable glamour, with all that was calculated to enthrall a young woman. The Gentleman from San Francisco, wearing for his part a silk hat and grey spats over patent-leather shoes, kept eyeing the famous beauty who stood near him, a tall, wonderful figure, blonde, with her eyes painted according to the latest Parisian fashion, holding on a silver chain a tiny, cringing, hairless little dog, to which she was addressing herself all the time. And the daughter, feeling some vague embarrassment, tried not to notice her father.

Like all Americans, he was very liberal with his money when travelling. And like all of them, he believed in the full sincerity and good-will of those who brought his food and drinks, served him from morn till night, anticipated his smallest desire, watched over his cleanliness and rest, carried his things, called the porters, conveyed his trunks to the hotels. So it was everywhere, so it was during the voyage, so it ought to be in Naples. Naples grew and drew nearer. The brass band, shining with the brass of the instruments, had already assembled on deck. Suddenly they deafened everybody with the strains of their triumphant rag-time. The giant captain appeared in full uniform on the bridge, and like a benign pagan idol waved his hands to the passengers in a gesture of welcome. And to the Gentleman from San Francisco, as well as to every other passenger, it seemed as if for him alone was thundered forth that rag-time march, so greatly beloved by proud America; for him alone the Captain's hand waved, welcoming him on his safe arrival. Then, when at last the *Atlantis* entered port and veered her many-tiered mass against the quay that was crowded with expectant people, when

the gangways began their rattling—ah, then what a lot of porters and their assistants in caps with golden galloons, what a lot of all sorts of commissionaires, whistling boys, and sturdy ragamuffins with packs of postcards in their hands rushed to meet the Gentleman from San Francisco with offers of their services! With what amiable contempt he grinned at those ragamuffins as he walked to the automobile of the very same hotel at which the prince would probably put up, and calmly muttered between his teeth, now in English, now in Italian—"Go away! Via!"

Life at Naples started immediately in the set routine. Early in the morning, breakfast in a gloomy dining-room with a draughty damp wind blowing in from the windows that opened on to a little stony garden: a cloudy, unpromising day, and a crowd of guides at the doors of the vestibule. Then the first smiles of a warm, pinky-coloured sun, and from the high, overhanging balcony a view of Vesuvius, bathed to the feet in the radiant vapours of the morning sky, while beyond, over the silvery-pearly ripple of the bay, the subtle outline of Capri upon the horizon! Then nearer, tiny donkeys running in two-wheeled buggies away below on the sticky embankment, and detachments of tiny soldiers marching off with cheerful and defiant music.

After this a walk to the taxi-stand, and a slow drive along crowded, narrow, damp corridors of streets, between high, many-windowed houses. Visits to deadly-clean museums, smoothly and pleasantly lighted, but monotonously, as if from the reflection of snow. Or visits to churches, cold, smelling of wax, and always the same thing: a majestic portal, curtained with a heavy leather curtain: inside, a huge emptiness, silence, lonely

little flames of clustered candles ruddying the depths of the interior on some altar decorated with ribbon: a forlorn old woman amid dark benches, slippery gravestones under one's feet, and somebody's infallibly famous "Descent from the Cross." Luncheon at one o'clock on San Martino, where quite a number of the very selectest people gather about midday, and where once the daughter of the Gentleman from San Francisco almost became ill with joy, fancying she saw the prince sitting in the hall, although she knew from the newspapers that he had gone to Rome for a time. At five o'clock, tea in the hotel, in the smart salon where it was so warm, with the deep carpets and blazing fires. After which the thought of dinner—and again the powerful commanding voice of the gong heard over all the floors, and again strings of bare-shouldered ladies rustling with their silks on the staircases and reflecting themselves in the mirrors, again the wide-flung, hospitable, palatial dining-room, the red jackets of musicians on the platform, the black flock of waiters around the *maître d' hôtel*, who with extraordinary skill was pouring out a thick, roseate soup into soup-plates. The dinners, as usual, were the crowning event of the day. Every one dressed as if for a wedding, and so abundant were the dishes, the wines, the table-waters, sweetmeats, and fruit, that at about eleven o'clock in the evening the chamber-maids would take to every room rubber hot-water bottles, to warm the stomachs of those who had dined.

None the less, December of that year was not a success for Naples. The porters and secretaries were abashed if spoken to about the weather, only guiltily lifting their shoulders and murmuring that they could not possibly remember such a season; although this was not the first

year they had had to make such murmurs, or to hint that "everywhere something terrible is happening." . . . Unprecedented rains and storms on the Riviera, snow in Athens, Etna also piled with snow and glowing red at night; tourists fleeing from the cold of Palermo. . . . The morning sun daily deceived the Neapolitans. The sky invariably grew grey towards midday, and fine rain began to fall, falling thicker and colder. The palms of the hotel approach glistened like wet tin; the city seemed peculiarly dirty and narrow, the museums excessively dull; the cigar-ends of the fat cab-men, whose rubber rain-capes flapped like wings in the wind, seemed insufferably stinking, the energetic cracking of whips over the ears of thin-necked horses sounded altogether false, and the clack of the shoes of the signorini who cleaned the tram-lines quite horrible, while the women, walking through the mud, with their black heads uncovered in the rain, seemed disgustingly short-legged: not to mention the stench and dampness of foul fish which drifted from the quay where the sea was foaming. The gentleman and lady from San Francisco began to bicker in the mornings; their daughter went about pale and head-achey, and then roused up again, went into raptures over everything, and was lovely, charming. Charming were those tender, complicated feelings which had been aroused in her by the meeting with the plain little man in whose veins ran such special blood. But after all, does it matter *what* awakens a maiden soul—whether it is money, fame, or noble birth? . . . Everybody declared that in Sorrento, or in Capri, it was quite different. There it was warmer, sunnier, the lemon-trees were in bloom, the morals were purer, the wine unadulterated. So behold, the family from San Francisco

decided to go with all their trunks to Capri, after which they would return and settle down in Sorrento: when they had seen Capri, trodden the stones where stood Tiberius' palaces, visited the famous caves of the Blue Grotto, and listened to the pipers from Abruzzi, who wander about the isle during the month of the Nativity, singing the praises of the Virgin.

On the day of departure—a very memorable day for the family from San Francisco—the sun did not come out even in the morning. A heavy fog hid Vesuvius to the base, and came greying low over the leaden heave of the sea, whose waters were concealed from the eye at a distance of half a mile. Capri was completely invisible, as if it had never existed on earth. The little steamer that was making for the island tossed so violently from side to side that the family from San Francisco lay like stones on the sofas in the miserable saloon of the tiny boat, their feet wrapped in plaids, and their eyes closed. The lady, as she thought, suffered worst of all, and several times was overcome with sickness. It seemed to her that she was dying. But the stewardess who came to and fro with the basin, the stewardess who had been for years, day in, day out, through heat and cold, tossing on these waves, and who was still indefatigable, even kind to every one—she only smiled. The younger lady from San Francisco was deathly pale, and held in her teeth a slice of lemon. Now not even the thought of meeting the prince at Sorrento, where he was due to arrive by Christmas, could gladden her. The gentleman lay flat on his back, in a broad overcoat and flat cap, and did not loosen his jaws throughout the voyage. His face grew dark, his moustache white, his head ached furiously. For the last few days, owing to the bad weather, he had

been drinking heavily, and had more than once admired the "tableaux vivants." The rain whipped on the rattling window-panes, under which water dripped on to the sofas, the wind beat the masts with a howl, and at moments, aided by an onrushing wave, laid the little steamer right on its side, whereupon something would roll noisily away below. At the stopping places, Castellamare, Sorrento, things were a little better. But even the ship heaved frightfully, and the coast with all its precipices, gardens, pines, pink and white hotels, and hazy, curly green mountains swooped past the window, up and down, as it were on swings. The boats bumped against the side of the ship, the sailors and passengers shouted lustily, and somewhere a child, as if crushed to death, choked itself with screaming. The damp wind blew through the doors, and outside on the sea, from a reeling boat which showed the flag of the Hotel Royal, a fellow with guttural French exaggeration yelled unceasingly: "Rrroy-al! Hotel Rrroy-al!" intending to lure passengers aboard his craft. Then the Gentleman from San Francisco, feeling, as he ought to have felt, quite an old man, thought with anguish and spite of all these "Royals," "Splendids," "Excelsiors," and of these greedy, good-for-nothing, garlic-stinking fellows called Italians. Once, during a halt, on opening his eyes and rising from the sofa he saw under the rocky cliff-curtain of the coast a heap of such miserable stone hovels, all musty and mouldy, stuck on top of one another by the very water, among the boats, and the rags of all sorts, tin cans and brown fishing-nets, and, remembering that this was the very Italy he had come to enjoy, he was seized with despair. . . . At last, in the twilight, the black mass of the island began to loom nearer, looking as if it were

bored through at the base with little red lights. The wind grew softer, warmer, more sweet-smelling. Over the tamed waves, undulating like black oil, there came flowing golden boa-constrictors of light from the lanterns of the harbour. . . . Then suddenly the anchor rumbled and fell with a splash into the water. Furious cries of the boatmen shouting against one another came from all directions. And relief was felt at once. The electric light of the cabin shone brighter, and a desire to eat, drink, smoke, move once more made itself felt. . . . Ten minutes later the family from San Francisco disembarked into a large boat; in a quarter of an hour they had stepped on to the stones of the quay, and were soon seated in the bright little car of the funicular railway. With a buzz they were ascending the slope, past the stakes of the vineyards and wet, sturdy orange-trees, here and there protected by straw screens, past the thick glossy foliage and the brilliancy of orange fruits. . . . Sweetly smells the earth in Italy after rain, and each of her islands has its own peculiar aroma.

The island of Capri was damp and dark that evening. For the moment, however, it had revived, and was lighted up here and there as usual at the hour of the steamer's arrival. At the top of the ascent, on the little piazza by the funicular station stood the crowd of those whose duty it was to receive with propriety the luggage of the Gentleman from San Francisco. There were other arrivals too, but none worthy of notice: a few Russians who had settled in Capri, untidy and absent-minded owing to their bookish thoughts, spectacled, bearded, half-buried in the upturned collars of their thick woollen overcoats. Then a group of long-legged, long-necked, round-headed German youths in Tirolese costumes, with

knapsacks over their shoulders, needing no assistance, feeling everywhere at home and always economical in tips. The Gentleman from San Francisco, who kept quietly apart from both groups, was marked out at once. He and his ladies were hastily assisted from the car, men ran in front to show them the way, and they set off on foot, surrounded by urchins and by the sturdy Capri women who carry on their heads the luggage of decent travellers. Across the piazza, that looked like an opera scene in the light of the electric globe that swung aloft in the damp wind, clacked the wooden pattens of the women-porters. The gang of urchins began to whistle to the Gentleman from San Francisco, and to turn somersaults around him, whilst he, as if on the stage, marched among them towards a mediæval archway and under huddled houses, behind which led a little echoing lane, past tufts of palm-trees showing above the flat roofs to the left, and under the stars in the dark blue sky, upwards towards the shining entrance of the hotel . . . . And again it seemed as if purely in honour of the guests from San Francisco the damp little town on the rocky little island of the Mediterranean had revived from its evening stupor, that their arrival alone had made the hotel proprietor so happy and hearty, and that for them had been waiting the Chinese gong which sent its howlings through all the house the moment they crossed the doorstep.

The sight of the proprietor, a superbly elegant young man with a polite and exquisite bow, startled for a moment the Gentleman from San Francisco. In the first flash, he remembered that amid the chaos of images which had possessed him the previous night in his sleep, he had seen that very man, to a *t* the same man, in the

same full-skirted frock-coat and with the same glossy, perfectly smoothed hair. Startled, he hesitated for a second. But long, long ago he had lost the last mustard-seed of any mystical feeling he might ever have had, and his surprise at once faded. He told the curious coincidence of dream and reality jestingly to his wife and daughter, as they passed along the hotel corridor. And only his daughter glanced at him with a little alarm. Her heart suddenly contracted with home-sickness, with such a violent feeling of loneliness in this dark, foreign island, that she nearly wept. As usual, however, she did not mention her feelings to her father.

Reuss XVII., a high personage who had spent three whole weeks on Capri, had just left, and the visitors were installed in the suite of rooms that he had occupied. To them was assigned the most beautiful and expert chambermaid, a Belgian with a thin, firmly corseted figure, and a starched cap in the shape of a tiny indented crown. The most experienced and distinguished-looking footman was placed at their service, a coal-black, fiery-eyed Sicilian, and also the smartest waiter, the small, stout Luigi, a tremendous buffoon, who had seen a good deal of life. In a minute or two a gentle tap was heard at the door of the Gentleman from San Francisco, and there stood the *maître d' hôtel*, a Frenchman, who had come to ask if the guests would take dinner, and to report, in case of answer in the affirmative—of which, however, he had small doubt—that this evening there were Mediterranean lobsters, roast beef, asparagus, pheasants, etc., etc. The floor was still rocking under the feet of the Gentleman from San Francisco, so rolled about had he been on that wretched, grubby Italian steamer. Yet with his own hands, calmly, though

clumsily from lack of experience, he closed the window which had banged at the entrance of the *maître d' hôtel,* shutting out the drifting smell of distant kitchens and of wet flowers in the garden. Then he turned and replied with unhurried distinctness, that they would take dinner, that their table must be far from the door, in the very centre of the dining-room, that they would have local wine and champagne, moderately dry and slightly cooled. To all of which the *maître d' hôtel* gave assent in the most varied intonations, which conveyed that there was not and could not be the faintest question of the justness of the desires of the Gentleman from San Francisco, and that everything should be exactly as he wished. At the end he inclined his head and politely inquired:

"Is that all, sir?"

On receiving a lingering "Yes," he added that Carmela and Giuseppe, famous all over Italy and "to all the world of tourists," were going to dance the tarantella that evening in the hall.

"I have seen picture-postcards of her," said the Gentleman from San Francisco, in a voice expressive of nothing. "And is Giuseppe her husband?"

"Her cousin, sir," replied the *maître d' hôtel.*

The Gentleman from San Francisco was silent for a while, thinking of something, but saying nothing; then he dismissed the man with a nod of the head. After which he began to make preparations as if for his wedding. He turned on all the electric lights, and filled the mirrors with brilliance and reflection of furniture and open trunks. He began to shave and wash, ringing the bell every minute, and down the corridor raced and crossed the impatient ringings from the rooms of his wife and daughter. Luigi, with the nimbleness peculiar to certain

stout people, making grimaces of horror which brought tears of laughter to the eyes of chambermaids dashing past with marble-white pails, turned a cart-wheel to the gentleman's door, and tapping with his knuckles, in a voice of sham timidity and respectfulness reduced to idiocy, asked:

"Ha suonato, Signore?"

From behind the door, a slow, grating, offensively polite voice:

"Yes, come in."

What were the feelings, what were the thoughts of the Gentleman from San Francisco on that evening so significant to him? He felt nothing exceptional, since unfortunately everything on this earth is too simple in appearance. Even had he felt something imminent in his soul, all the same he would have reasoned that, whatever it might be, it could not take place immediately. Besides, as with all who have just experienced sea-sickness, he was very hungry, and looked forward with delight to the first spoonful of soup, the first mouthful of wine. So he performed the customary business of dressing in a state of excitement which left no room for reflection.

Having shaved, washed, and dexterously arranged several artificial teeth, standing in front of the mirror, he moistened his silver-mounted brushes and plastered the remains of his thick pearly hair on his swarthy yellow skull. He drew on to his strong old body, with its abdomen protuberant from excessive good living, his cream-coloured silk underwear, put black silk socks and patent-leather slippers on his flat-footed feet. He put sleeve-links in the shining cuffs of his snow-white shirt, and bending forward so that his shirt front bulged out, he arranged his trousers that were pulled up high by his

silk braces, and began to torture himself, putting his collar-stud through the stiff collar. The floor was still rocking beneath him, the tips of his fingers hurt, the stud at moments pinched the flabby skin in the recess under his Adam's apple, but he persisted, and at last, with eyes all strained and face dove-blue from the over-tight collar that enclosed his throat, he finished the business and sat down exhausted in front of the pier glass, which reflected the whole of him, and repeated him in all the other mirrors.

"It is awful!" he muttered, dropping his strong, bald head, but without trying to understand or to know what was awful. Then, with habitual careful attention examining his gouty-jointed short fingers and large, convex, almond-shaped finger-nails, he repeated: "It is awful. . . ."

As if from a pagan temple shrilly resounded the second gong through the hotel. The Gentleman from San Francisco got up hastily, pulled his shirt-collar still tighter with his tie, and his abdomen tighter with his open waistcoat, settled his cuffs and again examined himself in the mirror. . . . "That Carmela, swarthy, with her enticing eyes, looking like a mulatto in her dazzling-coloured dress, chiefly orange, she must be an extraordinary dancer——" he was thinking. So, cheerfully leaving his room and walking on the carpet to his wife's room, he called to ask if they were nearly ready.

"In five minutes, Dad," came the gay voice of the girl from behind the door. "I'm arranging my hair."

"Right-o!" said the Gentleman from San Francisco.

Imagining to himself her long hair hanging to the floor, he slowly walked along the corridors and staircases covered with red carpet, downstairs, looking for the reading-room. The servants he encountered on the

way pressed close to the wall, and he walked past as if not noticing them. An old lady, late for dinner, already stooping with age, with milk-white hair and yet *decolletée* in her pale grey silk dress, hurried at top speed, funnily, henlike, and he easily overtook her. By the glass-door of the dining-room, wherein the guests had already started the meal, he stopped before a little table heaped with boxes of cigars and cigarettes, and taking a large Manilla, threw three liras on the table. After which he passed along the winter terrace, and glanced through an open window. From the darkness came a waft of soft air, and there loomed the top of an old palm-tree that spread its boughs over the stars, looking like a giant, bringing down the far-off smooth quivering of the sea. . . . In the reading-room, cosy with the shaded reading-lamps, a grey, untidy German, looking rather like Ibsen in his round silver-rimmed spectacles and with mad astonished eyes, stood rustling the newspapers. After coldly eyeing him, the Gentleman from San Francisco seated himself in a deep leather armchair in a corner, by a lamp with a green shade, put on his pince-nez, and, with a stretch of his neck because of the tightness of his shirt-collar, obliterated himself behind a newspaper. He glanced over the headlines, read a few sentences about the never-ending Balkan war, then with a habitual movement turned over the page of the newspaper—when suddenly the lines blazed up before him in a glassy sheen, his neck swelled, his eyes bulged, and the pince-nez came flying off his nose. . . . He lunged forward, wanted to breathe—and rattled wildly. His lower jaw dropped, and his mouth shone with gold fillings. His head fell swaying on his shoulder, his shirt-front bulged out basket-like, and all his body, writhing, with heels scraping up the carpet, slid

down to the floor, struggling desperately with some invisible foe.

If the German had not been in the reading-room, the frightful affair could have been hushed up. Instantly, through obscure passages the Gentleman from San Francisco could have been hurried away to some dark corner, and not a single guest would have discovered what he had been up to. But the German dashed out of the room with a yell, alarming the house and all the diners. Many sprang up from the table, upsetting their chairs, many, pallid, ran towards the reading-room, and in every language it was asked: "What—what's the matter?" None answered intelligibly, nobody understood, for even to-day people are more surprised at death than at anything else, and never want to believe it is true. The proprietor rushed from one guest to another, trying to keep back those who were hastening up, to soothe them with assurances that it was a mere trifle, a fainting-fit that had overcome a certain Gentleman from San Francisco. . . . But no one heeded him. Many saw how the porters and waiters were tearing off the tie, waist-coat, and crumpled dress-coat from that same gentleman, even, for some reason or other, pulling off his patent evening-shoes from his black-silk, flat-footed feet. And he was still writhing. He continued to struggle with death, by no means wanting to yield to that which had so unexpectedly and rudely overtaken him. He rolled his head, rattled like one throttled, and turned up the whites of his eyes as if he were drunk. When he had been hastily carried into room No. 43, the smallest, wretchedest, dampest, and coldest room at the end of the bottom corridor, his daughter came running with her hair all loose, her dressing-gown flying open, showing her

bosom raised by her corsets: then his wife, large and heavy and completely dressed for dinner, her mouth opened round with terror. But by that time he had already ceased rolling his head.

In a quarter of an hour the hotel settled down somehow or other. But the evening was ruined. The guests, returning to the dining-room, finished their dinner in silence, with a look of injury on their faces, whilst the proprietor went from one to another, shrugging his shoulders in hopeless and natural irritation, feeling himself guilty through no fault of his own, assuring everybody that he perfectly realized "how disagreeable this is," and giving his word that he would take "every possible measure within his power" to remove the trouble. The tarantella had to be cancelled, the superfluous lights were switched off, most of the guests went to the bar, and soon the house became so quiet that the ticking of the clock was heard distinctly in the hall, where the lonely parrot woodenly muttered something as he bustled about in his cage preparatory to going to sleep, and managed to fall asleep at length with his paw absurdly suspended from the little upper perch. . . . The Gentleman from San Francisco lay on a cheap iron bed under coarse blankets on to which fell a dim light from the obscure electric lamp in the ceiling. An ice-bag slid down on his wet, cold forehead; his blue, already lifeless face grew gradually cold; the hoarse bubbling which came from his open mouth, where the gleam of gold still showed, grew weak. The Gentleman from San Francisco rattled no longer; he was no more—something else lay in his place. His wife, his daughter, the doctor, and the servants stood and watched him dully. Suddenly that which they feared and expected happened. The rattling

ceased. And slowly, slowly under their eyes a pallor spread over the face of the deceased, his features began to grow thinner, more transparent . . . with a beauty which might have suited him long ago. . . .

Entered the proprietor. "Già, è morto!" whispered the doctor to him. The proprietor raised his shoulders, as if it were not his affair. The wife, on whose cheeks tears were slowly trickling, approached and timidly asked that the deceased should be taken to his own room.

"Oh no, madame," hastily replied the proprietor, politely, but coldly, and not in English, but in French. He was no longer interested in the trifling sum the guests from San Francisco would leave at his cash desk. "That is absolutely impossible." Adding by way of explanation, that he valued that suite of rooms highly, and that should he accede to madame's request, the news would be known all over Capri and no one would take the suite afterwards.

The young lady, who had glanced at him strangely all the time, now sat down in a chair and sobbed, with her handkerchief to her mouth. The elder lady's tears dried at once, her face flared up. Raising her voice and using her own language she began to insist, unable to believe that the respect for them had gone already. The manager cut her short with polite dignity. "If madame does not like the ways of the hotel, he dare not detain her." And he announced decisively that the corpse must be removed at dawn: the police had already been notified, and an official would arrive presently to attend to the necessary formalities. "Is it possible to get a plain coffin?" madame asked. Unfortunately not! Impossible! And there was no time to make one. It would have to be arranged somehow. Yes, the English soda-water came in

large strong boxes—if the divisions were removed.

The whole hotel was asleep. The window of No. 43 was open, on to a corner of the garden where, under a high stone wall ridged with broken glass, grew a battered banana tree. The light was turned off, the door locked, the room deserted. The deceased remained in the darkness, blue stars glanced at him from the black sky, a cricket started to chirp with sad carelessness in the wall . . . . Out in the dimly-lit corridor two chambermaids were seated in a window-sill, mending something. Entered Luigi, in slippers, with a heap of clothes in his hand.

"Pronto?" he asked, in a singing whisper, indicating with his eyes the dreadful door at the end of the corridor. Then giving a slight wave thither with his free hand: "Patenza!" he shouted in a whisper, as though sending off a train. The chambermaids, choking with noiseless laughter, dropped their heads on each other's shoulders.

Tip-toeing, Luigi went to the very door, tapped, and cocking his head on one side asked respectfully, in a subdued tone:

"Ha suonato, Signore?"

Then contracting his throat and shoving out his jaw, he answered himself in a grating, drawling, mournful voice, which seemed to come from behind the door:

"*Yes, come in. . . .* "

When the dawn grew white at the window of No. 43, and a damp wind began rustling the tattered fronds of the banana tree; as the blue sky of morning lifted and unfolded over Capri, and Monte Solaro, pure and distinct, grew golden, catching the sun which was rising beyond the far-off blue mountains of Italy; just as the labourers who were mending the paths of the islands for the

tourists came out for work, a long box was carried into room No. 43. Soon this box weighed heavily, and it painfully pressed the knees of the porter who was carrying it in a one-horse cab down the winding white high-road, between stone walls and vineyards, down, down the face of Capri to the sea. The driver, a weakly little fellow with reddened eyes, in a little old jacket with sleeves too short and bursting boots, kept flogging his wiry small horse that was decorated in Sicilian fashion, its harness tinkling with busy little bells and fringed with fringes of scarlet wool, the high saddle-peak gleaming with copper and tufted with colour, and a yard-long plume nodding from the pony's cropped head, from between the ears. The cabby had spent the whole night playing dice in the inn, and was still under the effects of drink. Silent, he was depressed by his own debauchery and vice: by the fact that he gambled away to the last farthing all those copper coins with which his pockets had yesterday been full, in all four lire, forty centesimi. But the morning was fresh. In such air, with the sea all round, under the morning sky headaches evaporate, and man soon regains his cheerfulness. Moreover, the cabby was cheered by this unexpected fare which he was making out of some Gentleman from San Francisco, who was nodding with his dead head in a box at the back. The little steamer, which lay like a water-beetle on the tender bright blueness which brims the bay of Naples, was already giving the final hoots, and this tooting resounded again cheerily all over the island. Each contour, each ridge, each rock was so clearly visible in every direction, it was as if there were no atmosphere at all. Near the beach the porter in the cab was overtaken by the head porter dashing down in an

automobile with the lady and her daughter, both pale, their eyes swollen with the tears of a sleepless night. . . . And in ten minutes the little steamer again churned up the water and made her way back to Sorrento, to Castellamare, bearing away from Capri for ever the family from San Francisco. . . . And peace and tranquillity reigned once more on the island.

On that island two thousand years ago lived a man entangled in his own infamous and strange acts, one whose rule for some reason extended over millions of people, and who, having lost his head through the absurdity of such power, committed deeds which have established him for ever in the memory of mankind; mankind which in the mass now rules the world just as hideously and incomprehensibly as he ruled it then. And men come here from all quarters of the globe to look at the ruins of the stone house where that one man lived, on the brink of one of the steepest cliffs in the island. On this exquisite morning all who had come to Capri for that purpose were still asleep in the hotels, although through the streets already trotted little mouse-coloured donkeys with red saddles, towards the hotel entrances where they would wait patiently until, after a good sleep and a square meal, young and old American men and women, German men and women would emerge and be hoisted up into the saddles, to be followed up the stony paths, yea to the very summit of Monte Tiberio, by old persistent beggar-women of Capri, with sticks in their sinewy hands. Quieted by the fact that the dead old Gentleman from San Francisco, who had intended to be one of the pleasure party but who had only succeeded in frightening the rest with the reminder of death, was now being shipped to Naples, the happy

tourists still slept soundly, the island was still quiet, the shops in the little town not yet open. Only fish and greens were being sold in the tiny piazza, only simple folk were present, and amongst them, as usual without occupation, the tall old boatman Lorenzo, thorough debauchee and handsome figure, famous all over Italy, model for many a picture. He had already sold for a trifle two lobsters which he had caught in the night, and which were rustling in the apron of the cook of that very same hotel where the family from San Francisco had spent the night. And now Lorenzo could stand calmly till evening, with a majestic air showing off his rags and gazing round, holding his clay pipe with its long reed mouth-piece in his hand, and letting his scarlet bonnet slip over one ear. For as a matter of fact he received a salary from the little town, from the commune which found it profitable to pay him to stand about and make a picturesque figure—as everybody knows. . . . Down the precipices of Monte Solaro, down the stony little stairs cut in the rock of the old Phœnician road came two Abruzzi mountaineers, descending from Anacapri. One carried a bagpipe under his leather cloak, a large goat skin with two little pipes; the other had a sort of wooden flute. They descended, and the whole land, joyous, was sunny beneath them. They saw the rocky, heaving shoulder of the island, which lay almost entirely at their feet, swimming in the fairy blueness of the water. Shining morning vapours rose over the sea to the east, under a dazzling sun which already burned hot as it rose higher and higher; and there, far off, the dimly cerulean masses of Italy, of her near and far mountains, still wavered blue as if in the world's morning, in a beauty no words can express. . . . Halfway down the descent

the pipers slackened their pace. Above the road, in a grotto of the rocky face of Monte Solaro stood the Mother of God, the sun full upon her, giving her a splendour of snow-white and blue raiment, and royal crown rusty from all weathers. Meek and merciful, she raised her eyes to heaven, to the eternal and blessed mansions of her thrice-holy Son. The pipers bared their heads, put their pipes to their lips: and there streamed forth naive and meekly joyous praises to the sun, to the morning, to Her, Immaculate, who would intercede for all who suffer in this malicious and lovely world, and to Him, born of Her womb among the caves of Bethlehem, in a lowly shepherd's hut, in the far Judean land. . . .

And the body of the dead old man from San Francisco was returning home, to its grave, to the shores of the New World. Having been subjected to many humiliations, much human neglect, after a week's wandering from one warehouse to another, it was carried at last on to the same renowned vessel which so short a time ago, and with such honour, had borne him living to the Old World. But now he was to be hidden far from the knowledge of the voyagers. Closed in a tar-coated coffin, he was lowered deep into the vessel's dark hold. And again, again the ship set out on the long voyage. She passed at night near Capri, and to those who were looking out from the island, sad seemed the lights of the ship slowly hiding themselves in the sea's darkness. But there aboard the liner, in the bright halls shining with lights and marble, gay dancing filled the evening, as usual. . . .

The second evening, and the third evening, still they danced, amid a storm that swept over the ocean,

booming like a funeral service, rolling up mountains of mourning darkness silvered with foam. Through the snow the numerous fiery eyes of the ship were hardly visible to the Devil who watched from the rocks of Gibraltar, from the stony gateway of two worlds, peering after the vessel as she disappeared into the night and storm. The Devil was huge as a cliff. But huger still was the liner, many storeyed, many funnelled, created by the presumption of the New Man with the old heart. The blizzard smote the rigging and the funnels, and whitened the ship with snow, but she was enduring, firm, majestic —and horrible. On the topmost deck rose lonely amongst the snowy whirlwind the cosy and dim quarters where lay the heavy master of the ship, he who was like a pagan idol, sunk now in a light, uneasy slumber. Through his sleep he heard the sombre howl and furious screechings of the siren, muffled by the blizzard. But again he reassured himself by the nearness of that which stood behind his wall, and was in the last resort incomprehensible to him: by the large, apparently armoured cabin which was now and then filled with a mysterious rumbling, throbbing, and crackling of blue fires that flared up explosive around the pale face of the telegraphist who, with a metal hoop fixed on his head, was eagerly straining to catch the dim voices of vessels which spoke to him from hundreds of miles away. In the depths, in the under-water womb of the *Atlantis*, steel glimmered and steam wheezed, and huge masses of machinery and thousand-ton boilers dripped with water and oil, as the motion of the ship was steadily cooked in this vast kitchen heated by hellish furnaces from beneath. Here bubbled in their awful concentration the powers which were being transmitted to the keel, down an infinitely

long round tunnel lit up and brilliant like a gigantic gun-barrel, along which slowly, with a regularity crushing to the human soul, revolved a gigantic shaft, precisely like a living monster coiling and uncoiling its endless length down the tunnel, sliding on its bed of oil. The middle of the *Atlantis*, the warm, luxurious cabins, dining-rooms, halls, shed light and joy, buzzed with the chatter of an elegant crowd, was fragrant with fresh flowers, and quivered with the sounds of a string orchestra. And again amidst that crowd, amidst the brilliance of lights, silks, diamonds, and bare feminine shoulders, a slim and supple pair of hired lovers painfully writhed and at moments convulsively clashed. A sinfully discreet, pretty girl with lowered lashes and hair innocently dressed, and a tallish young man with black hair looking as if it were glued on, pale with powder, and wearing the most elegant patent-leather shoes and a narrow, long-tailed dress coat, a beau resembling an enormous leech. And no one knew that this couple had long since grown weary of shamly tormenting themselves with their beatific love-tortures, to the sound of bawdy-sad music; nor did any one know of that thing which lay deep, deep below at the very bottom of the dark hold, near the gloomy and sultry bowels of the ship that was so gravely overcoming the darkness, the ocean, the blizzard. . . .

# GENTLE BREATHING

In the cemetery above a fresh mound of earth stands a new cross of oak—strong, heavy, smooth, a pleasant thing to look at. It is April, but the days are grey. From a long way off one can see through the bare trees the tomb-stones in the cemetery—a spacious, real country or cathedral town cemetery; the cold wind goes whistling, whistling through the china wreath at the foot of the cross. In the cross itself is set a rather large bronze medallion, and in the medallion is a portrait of a smart and charming school-girl, with happy, astonishingly vivacious eyes.

It is Olga Meschersky.

As a little girl there was nothing to distinguish her in the noisy crowd of brown dresses which made its discordant and youthful hum in the corridors and classrooms; all that one could say of her was that she was just one of a number of pretty, rich, happy little girls, that she was clever, but playful, and very careless of the precepts of her class-teacher. Then she began to develop and to blossom, not by days, but by hours. At fourteen, with a slim waist and graceful legs, there was already well developed the outline of her breasts and all those contours of which the charm has never yet been expressed in human words; at fifteen she was said to be a beauty. How carefully some of her school friends did their hair, how clean they were, how careful and restrained in their movements! But she was afraid of nothing—neither

of ink-stains on her fingers, nor of a flushed face, nor of dishevelled hair, nor of a bare knee after a rush and a tumble. Without a thought or an effort on her part, imperceptibly there came to her everything which so distinguished her from the rest of the school during her last two years—daintiness, smartness, quickness, the bright and intelligent gleam in her eyes. No one danced like Olga Meschersky, no one could run or skate like her, no one at dances had as many admirers as she had, and for some reason no one was so popular with the junior classes. Imperceptibly she grew up into a girl and imperceptibly her fame in the school became established, and already there were rumours that she is flighty, that she cannot live without admirers, that the schoolboy, Shensin, is madly in love with her, that she, too, perhaps loves him, but is so changeable in her treatment of him that he tried to commit suicide. . . .

During her last winter, Olga Meschersky went quite crazy with happiness, so they said at school. It was a snowy, sunny, frosty winter; the sun would go down early behind the grove of tall fir-trees in the snowy school garden; but it was always fine and radiant weather, with a promise of frost and sun again to-morrow, a walk in Cathedral Street, skating in the town park, a pink sunset, music, and that perpetually moving crowd in which Olga Meschersky seemed to be the smartest, the most careless, and the happiest. And then, one day, when she was rushing like a whirlwind through the recreation room with the little girls chasing her and screaming for joy, she was unexpectedly called up to the headmistress. She stopped short, took one deep breath, with a quick movement, already a habit, arranged her hair, gave a pull to the corners of her apron to bring it up on her shoulders,

and with shining eyes ran upstairs. The headmistress, small, youngish, but grey-haired, sat quietly with her knitting in her hands at the writing-table, under the portrait of the Tsar.

"Good morning, Miss Meschersky," she said in French, without lifting her eyes from her knitting. "I am sorry that this is not the first time that I have had to call you here to speak to you about your behaviour."

"I am attending, madam," answered Olga, coming up to the table, looking at her brightly and happily, but with an expressionless face, and curtsying so lightly and gracefully, as only she could.

"You will attend badly–unfortunately I have become convinced of that," said the headmistress, giving a pull at the thread so that the ball rolled away over the polished floor, and Olga watched it with curiosity. The headmistress raised her eyes: "I shall not repeat myself, I shall not say much," she said.

Olga very much liked the unusually clean and large study; on frosty days the air in it was so pleasant with the warmth from the shining Dutch fire-place, and the fresh lilies-of-the-valley on the writing table. She glanced at the young Tsar, painted full-length in a splendid hall, at the smooth parting in the white, neatly waved hair of the headmistress; she waited in silence.

"You are no longer a little girl," said the headmistress meaningly, beginning to feel secretly irritated.

"Yes, madam," answered Olga simply, almost merrily.

"But neither are you a woman yet," said the headmistress, still more meaningly, and her pale face flushed a little. "To begin with, why do you do your hair like that? You do it like a woman."

"It is not my fault, madam, that I have nice hair,"

Olga replied, and gave a little touch with both hands to her beautifully dressed hair.

"Ah, is that it? You are not to blame!" said the headmistress. "You are not to blame for the way you do your hair; you are not to blame for those expensive combs; you are not to blame for ruining your parents with your twenty-rouble shoes. But, I repeat, you completely forget that you are still only a schoolgirl. . . ."

And here Olga, without losing her simplicity and calm, suddenly interrupted her politely:

"Excuse me, madam, you are mistaken—I am a woman. And, do you know who is to blame for that? My father's friend and neighbour, your brother, Alexey Mikhailovitch Malyntin. It happened last summer in the country. . . ."

And a month after this conversation, a Cossack officer, ungainly and of plebeian appearance, who had absolutely nothing in common with Olga Meschersky's circle, shot her on the platform of the railway station, in a large crowd of people who had just arrived by train. And the incredible confession of Olga Meschersky, which had stunned the headmistress, was completely confirmed; the officer told the coroner that Meschersky had led him on, had had a *liaison* with him, had promised to marry him, and at the railway station on the day of the murder, while seeing him off to Novocherkask had suddenly told him that she had never thought of marrying him, that all the talk about marriage was only to make a fool of him, and she gave him her diary to read with the pages in it which told about Malyntin.

"I glanced through those pages," said the officer, "went out on to the platform where she was walking

up and down, and waiting for me to finish reading it, and I shot her. The diary is in the pocket of my overcoat; look at the entry for July 10 of last year."

And this is what the coroner read:

"It is now nearly two o'clock in the morning. I fell sound asleep, but woke up again immediately. . . . I have become a woman to-day! Papa, mamma, and Tolya had all gone to town, and I was left alone. I cannot say how happy I was to be alone. In the morning I walked in the orchard, in the field, and I went into the woods, and it seemed to me that I was all by myself in the whole world, and I never had such pleasant thoughts before. I had lunch by myself; then I played for an hour, and the music made me feel that I should live for ever, and be happier than any one else had ever been. Then I fell asleep in papa's study, and at four o'clock Kate woke me, and said that Alexey Mikhailovitch had come. I was very glad to see him; it was so pleasant to receive him and entertain him. He came with his pair of Viatka horses, very beautiful, and they stood all the time at the front door, but he stayed because it was raining, and hoped that the roads would dry towards evening. He was very sorry not to find papa at home, was very animated and treated me very politely, and made many jokes about his having been long in love with me. Before tea we walked in the garden, and the weather was charming, the sun shining through the whole wet garden; but it grew quite cold, and he walked with me, arm in arm, and said that he was Faust with Margarete. He is fifty-six, but still very handsome, and always very well dressed—the only thing I didn't like was his coming in a sort of cape—he smells of English eau-de-Cologne, and his eyes are quite young, black; his beard is long and elegantly

parted down the middle, it is quite silvery. We had tea in the glass verandah, and suddenly I did not feel very well, and lay down on the sofa while he smoked; then he sat down near me, and began to say nice things, and then to take my hand and kiss it. I covered my face with a silk handkerchief, and several times he kissed me on the lips through the handkerchief. . . . I can't understand how it happened; I went mad; I never thought I was like that. Now I have only one way out. . . . I feel such a loathing for him that I cannot endure it. . . ."

The town in these April days has become clean and dry, its stones have become white, and it is easy and pleasant to walk on them. Every Sunday, after mass, along Cathedral Street which leads out of the town, there walks a little woman in mourning, in black kid gloves, and with an ebony sunshade. She crosses the yard of the fire-station, crosses the dirty market-place by the road where there are many black smithies, and where the wind blows fresher from the fields; in the distance, between the monastery and the gaol, is the white slope of the sky and the grey of the spring fields; and then, when you have passed the muddy pools behind the monastery wall and turn to the left, you will see what looks like a large low garden, surrounded by a white wall, on the gates of which is written "The Assumption of Our Lady." The little woman makes rapid little signs of the cross, and always walks on the main path. When she gets to the bench opposite the oak cross she sits down, in the wind and the chilly spring, for an hour, two hours, until her feet in the light boots, and her hand in the narrow kid glove, grow quite cold. Listening to the birds of spring, singing sweetly even in the cold,

listening to the whistling of the wind through the porcelain wreath, she sometimes thinks that she would give half her life if only that dead wreath might not be before her eyes. The thought that it is Olga Meschersky who has been buried in that clay plunges her into astonishment bordering upon stupidity: how can one associate the sixteen-year-old school-girl, who but two or three months ago was so full of life, charm, happiness, with that mound of earth and that oak cross. Is it possible that beneath it is the same girl whose eyes shine out immortally from this bronze medallion, and how can one connect this bright look with the horrible event which is associated now with Olga Meschersky? But in the depths of her soul the little woman is happy, as are all those who are in love or are generally devoted to some passionate dream.

The woman is Olga Meschersky's class-mistress, a girl over thirty, who has for long been living on some illusion and putting it in the place of her actual life. At first the illusion was her brother, a poor lieutenant, in no way remarkable—her whole soul was bound up in him and in his future, which, for some reason, she imagined as splendid, and she lived in the curious expectation that, thanks to him, her fate would transport her into some fairyland. Then, when he was killed at Mukden, she persuaded herself that she, very happily, is not like others, that instead of beauty and womanliness she has intellect and higher interests, that she is a worker for the ideal. And now Olga Meschersky is the object of all her thoughts, of her admiration and joy. Every holiday she goes to her grave—she had formed the habit of going to the cemetery after the death of her brother—for hours she never takes her eyes off the oak cross; she recalls

Olga Meschersky's pale face in the coffin amid the flowers, and remembers what she once overheard: once during the luncheon hour, while walking in the school garden, Olga Meschersky was quickly, quickly saying to her favourite friend, the tall plump Subbotin:

"I have been reading one of papa's books—he has a lot of funny old books—I read about the kind of beauty which woman ought to possess. There's such a lot written there, you see, I can't remember it all; well, of course, eyes black as boiling pitch—upon my word, that's what they say there, boiling pitch!—eye-brows black as night, and a tender flush in the complexion, a slim figure, hands longer than the ordinary—little feet, a fairly large breast, a regularly rounded leg, a knee the colour of the inside of a shell, high but sloping shoulders—a good deal of it I have nearly learnt by heart, it is all so true; but do you know what the chief thing is? Gentle breathing! And I have got it; you listen how I breathe; isn't it gentle?"

Now the gentle breathing has again vanished away into the world, into the cloudy day, into the cold spring wind. . . .

# KASIMIR STANISLAVOVITCH

On the yellow card with a nobleman's coronet the young porter at the Hotel "Versailles" somehow managed to read the Christian name and patronymic "Kasimir Stanislavovitch."[1] There followed something still more complicated and still more difficult to pronounce. The porter turned the card this way and that way in his hand, looked at the passport, which the visitor had given him with it, shrugged his shoulders– none of those who stayed at the "Versailles" gave their cards–then he threw both on to the table and began again to examine himself in the silvery, milky mirror which hung above the table, whipping up his thick hair with a comb. He wore an overcoat and shiny top-boots; the gold braid on his cap was greasy with age–the hotel was a bad one.

Kasimir Stanislavovitch left Kiev for Moscow on April 8th, Good Friday, on receiving a telegram with the one word "tenth." Somehow or other he managed to get the money for his fare, and took his seat in a second-class compartment, grey and dim, but really giving him the sensation of comfort and luxury. The train was heated, and that railway-carriage heat and the smell of the heating apparatus, and the sharp tapping of the little hammers in it, reminded Kasimir Stanislavovitch of other times. At times it seemed to him that winter had returned, that in the fields the white, very white drifts of snow had covered up the yellowish bristle of stubble

[1] *I.e.* There was no family name. The name is Polish, not Russian.

and the large leaden pools where the wild-duck swam. But often the snow-storm stopped suddenly and melted; the fields grew bright, and one felt that behind the clouds was much light, and the wet platforms of the railway-stations looked black, and the rooks called from the naked poplars. At each big station Kasimir Stanislavovitch went to the refreshment-room for a drink, and returned to his carriage with newspapers in his hands; but he did not read them; he only sat and sank in the thick smoke of his cigarettes, which burned and glowed, and to none of his neighbours—Odessa Jews who played cards all the time—did he say a single word. He wore an autumn overcoat of which the pockets were worn, a very old black top-hat, and new, but heavy, cheap boots. His hands, the typical hands of an habitual drunkard, and an old inhabitant of basements, shook when he lit a match. Everything else about him spoke of poverty and drunkenness: no cuffs, a dirty linen collar, an ancient tie, an inflamed and ravaged face, bright-blue watery eyes. His side-whiskers, dyed with a bad, brown dye, had an unnatural appearance. He looked tired and contemptuous.

The train reached Moscow next day, not at all up to time; it was seven hours late. The weather was neither one thing nor the other, but better and drier than in Kiev, with something stirring in the air. Kasimir Stanislavovitch took a cab without bargaining with the driver, and told him to drive straight to the "Versailles." "I have known that hotel, my good fellow," he said, suddenly breaking his silence, "since my student days." From the "Versailles," as soon as his little bag, tied with stout rope, had been taken up to his room, he immediately went out.

It was nearly evening: the air was warm, the black trees on the boulevards were turning green; everywhere there were crowds of people, cars, carts. Moscow was trafficking and doing business, was returning to the usual, pressing work, was ending her holiday, and unconsciously welcomed the spring. A man who has lived his life and ruined it feels lonely on a spring evening in a strange, crowded city. Kasimir Stanislavovitch walked the whole length of the Tverskoy Boulevard; he saw once more the cast-iron figure of the musing Poushkin, the golden and lilac top of the Strasnoy Monastery. . . . For about an hour he sat at the Café Filippov, drank chocolate, and read old comic papers. Then he went to a cinema, whose flaming signs shone from far away down the Tverskaya, through the darkling twilight. From the cinema he drove to a restaurant on the boulevard which he had also known in his student days. He was driven by an old man, bent in a bow, sad, gloomy, deeply absorbed in himself, in his old age, in his dark thoughts. All the way the man painfully and wearily helped on his lazy horse with his whole being, murmuring something to it all the time and occasionally bitterly reproaching it—and at last, when he reached the place, he allowed the load to slip from his shoulders for a moment and gave a deep sigh, as he took the money.

"I did not catch the name, and thought you meant 'Brague'!" he muttered, turning his horse slowly; he seemed displeased, although the "Prague" was further away.

"I remember the 'Prague' too, old fellow," answered Kasimir Stanislavovitch. "You must have been driving for a long time in Moscow."

"Driving?" the old man said; "I have been driving now

for fifty-one years."

"That means that you may have driven me before," said Kasimir Stanislavovitch.

"Perhaps I did," answered the old man dryly. "There are lots of people in the world; one can't remember all of you."

Of the old restaurant, once known to Kasimir Stanislavovitch, there remained only the name. Now it was a large, first-class, though vulgar, restaurant. Over the entrance burnt an electric globe which illuminated with its unpleasant, heliotrope light the smart, second-rate cabmen, impudent, and cruel to their lean, short-winded steeds. In the damp hall stood pots of laurels and tropical plants of the kind which one sees carried on to the platforms from weddings to funerals and *vice versa*. From the porters' lodge several men rushed out together to Kasimir Stanislavovitch, and all of them had just the same thick curl of hair as the porter at the "Versailles." In the large greenish room, decorated in the rococo style, were a multitude of broad mirrors, and in the corner burnt a crimson icon-lamp. The room was still empty, and only a few of the electric lights were on. Kasimir Stanislavovitch sat for a long time alone, doing nothing. One felt that behind the windows with their white blinds the long, spring evening had not yet grown dark; one heard from the street the thudding of hooves; in the middle of the room there was the monotonous splash-splash of the little fountain in an aquarium round which gold-fish, with their scales peeling off, lighted somehow from below, swam through the water. A waiter in white brought the dinner things, bread, and a decanter of cold vodka. Kasimir Stanislavovitch began drinking the vodka, held it in his mouth before swallowing it, and, having

swallowed it, smelt the black bread as though with loathing. With a suddenness which gave even him a start, a gramophone began to roar out through the room a mixture of Russian songs, now exaggeratedly boisterous and turbulent, now too tender, drawling, sentimental. . . . And Kasimir Stanislavovitch's eyes grew red and tears filmed them at that sweet and snuffling drone of the machine.

Then a grey-haired, curly, black-eyed Georgian brought him, on a large iron fork, a half-cooked, smelly shashlyk, cut off the meat on to the plate with a kind of dissolute smartness, and, with Asiatic simplicity, with his own hand sprinkled it with onions, salt, and rusty barbery powder, while the gramophone roared out in the empty hall a cake-walk, inciting one to jerks and spasms. Then Kasimir Stanislavovitch was served with cheese, fruit, red wine, coffee, mineral water, liqueurs. . . . The gramophone had long ago grown silent; instead of it there had been playing on the platform an orchestra of German women dressed in white; the lighted hall, continually filling up with people, grew hot, became dim with tobacco smoke and heavily saturated with the smell of food; waiters rushed about in a whirl; drunken people ordered cigars which immediately made them sick; the head-waiters showed excessive officiousness, combined with an intense realization of their own dignity; in the mirrors, in the watery gloom of their abysses, there was more and more chaotically reflected something huge, noisy, complicated. Several times Kasimir Stanislavovitch went out of the hot hall into the cool corridors, into the cold lavatory, where there was a strange smell of the sea; he walked as if on air, and, on returning to his table, again ordered wine. After midnight, closing his

eyes and drawing the fresh night air through his nostrils into his intoxicated head, he raced in a hansom-cab on rubber tyres out of the town to a brothel; he saw in the distance infinite chains of light, running away somewhere down hill and then up hill again, but he saw it just as if it were not he, but some one else, seeing it. In the brothel he nearly had a fight with a stout gentleman who attacked him shouting that he was known to all thinking Russia. Then he lay, dressed, on a broad bed, covered with a satin quilt, in a little room half-lighted from the ceiling by a sky-blue lantern, with a sickly smell of scented soap, and with dresses hanging from a hook on the door. Near the bed stood a dish of fruit, and the girl who had been hired to entertain Kasimir Stanislavovitch, silently, greedily, with relish ate a pear, cutting off slices with a knife, and her friend, with fat bare arms, dressed only in a chemise which made her look like a little girl, was rapidly writing on the toilet-table, taking no notice of them. She wrote and wept—of what? There are lots of people in the world; one can't know everything. . . .

On the tenth of April Kasimir Stanislavovitch woke up early. Judging from the start with which he opened his eyes, one could see that he was overwhelmed by the idea that he was in Moscow. He had got back after four in the morning. He staggered down the staircase of the "Versailles," but without a mistake he went straight to his room down the long, stinking tunnel of a corridor which was lighted only at its entrance by a little lamp smoking sleepily. Outside every room stood boots and shoes—all of strangers, unknown to one another, hostile to one another. Suddenly a door opened, almost terrifying Kasimir Stanislavovitch; on its threshold appeared an

old man, looking like a third-rate actor acting "The Memoirs of a Lunatic," and Kasimir Stanislavovitch saw a lamp under a green shade and a room crowded with things, the cave of a lonely, old lodger, with icons in the corner, and innumerable cigarette boxes piled one upon another almost to the ceiling, near the icons. Was that the half-crazy writer of the lives of the saints, who had lived in the "Versailles" twenty-three years ago? Kasimir Stanislavovitch's dark room was terribly hot with a malignant and smelly dryness. . . . The light from the window over the door came faintly into the darkness. Kasimir Stanislavovitch went behind the screen, took the top-hat off his thin, greasy hair, threw his overcoat over the end of his bare bed. . . . As soon as he lay down, everything began to turn round him, to rush into an abyss, and he fell asleep instantly. In his sleep all the time he was conscious of the smell of the iron wash-stand which stood close to his face, and he dreamt of a spring day, trees in blossom, the hall of a manor house and a number of people waiting anxiously for the bishop to arrive at any moment; and all night long he was wearied and tormented with that waiting. . . . Now in the corridors of the "Versailles" people rang, ran, called to one another. Behind the screen, through the double, dusty window-panes, the sun shone; it was almost hot. . . . Kasimir Stanislavovitch took off his jacket, rang the bell, and began to wash. There came in a quick-eyed boy, the page-boy, with fox-coloured hair on his head, in a frock-coat and pink shirt.

"A loaf, samovar, and lemon," Kasimir Stanislavovitch said without looking at him.

"And tea and sugar?" the boy asked with Moscow sharpness.

And a minute later he rushed in with a boiling samovar in his hand, held out level with his shoulders; on the round table in front of the sofa he quickly put a tray with a glass and a battered brass slop-basin, and thumped the samovar down on the tray. . . . Kasimir Stanislavovitch, while the tea was drawing, mechanically opened the *Moscow Daily*, which the page-boy had brought in with the samovar. His eye fell on a report that yesterday an unknown man had been picked up unconscious. . . . "The victim was taken to the hospital," he read, and threw the paper away. He felt very bad and unsteady. He got up and opened the window—it faced the yard—and a breath of freshness and of the city came to him; there came to him the melodious shouts of hawkers, the bells of horse-trams humming behind the house opposite, the blended rap-tap of the cars, the musical drone of church-bells. . . . The city had long since started its huge, noisy life in that bright, jolly, almost spring day. Kasimir Stanislavovitch squeezed the lemon into a glass of tea and greedily drank the sour, muddy liquid; then he again went behind the screen. The "Versailles" was quiet. It was pleasant and peaceful; his eye wandered leisurely over the hotel notice on the wall: "A stay of three hours is reckoned as a full day." A mouse scuttled in the chest of drawers, rolling about a piece of sugar left there by some visitor. . . . Thus half asleep Kasimir Stanislavovitch lay for a long time behind the screen, until the sun had gone from the room and another freshness was wafted in from the window, the freshness of evening.

Then he carefully got himself in order; he undid his bag, changed his underclothing, took out a cheap, but clean handkerchief, brushed his shiny frock-coat, top-

hat, and overcoat, took out of its torn pocket a crumpled Kiev newspaper of January 15, and threw it away into the corner. . . . Having dressed and combed his whiskers with a dyeing comb, he counted his money—there remained in his purse four roubles, seventy copecks—and went out. Exactly at six o'clock he was outside a low, ancient, little church in the Molchanovka. Behind the church fence a spreading tree was just breaking into green; children were playing there—the black stocking of one thin little girl, jumping over a rope, was continually coming down—and he sat there on a bench among perambulators with sleeping babies and nurses in Russian costumes. Sparrows prattled over all the tree; the air was soft, all but summer—even the dust smelt of summer—the sky above the sunset behind the houses melted into a gentle gold, and one felt that once more there was somewhere in the world joy, youth, happiness. In the church the chandeliers were already burning, and there stood the pulpit and in front of the pulpit was spread a little carpet. Kasimir Stanislavovitch cautiously took off his top-hat, trying not to untidy his hair, and entered the church nervously; he went into a corner, but a corner from which he could see the couple to be married. He looked at the painted vault, raised his eyes to the cupola, and his every movement and every gasp echoed loudly through the silence. The church shone with gold; the candles sputtered expectantly. And now the priests and choir began to enter, crossing themselves with the carelessness which comes of habit, then old women, children, smart wedding guests, and worried stewards. A noise was heard in the porch, the crunching wheels of the carriage, and every one turned their heads towards the entrance, and the hymn burst out "Come, my dove!" Kasimir

Stanislavovitch became deadly pale, as his heart beat, and unconsciously he took a step forward. And close by him there passed—her veil touching him, and a breath of lily-of-the-valley—she who did not know even of his existence in the world; she passed, bending her charming head, all flowers and transparent gauze, all snow-white and innocent, happy and timid, like a princess going to her first communion. . . . Kasimir Stanislavovitch hardly saw the bride-groom who came to meet her, a rather small, broad-shouldered man with yellow, close-cropped hair. During the whole ceremony only one thing was before his eyes: the bent head, in the flowers and the veil, and the little hand trembling as it held a burning candle tied with a white ribbon in a bow. . . .

About ten o'clock he was back again in the hotel. All his overcoat smelt of the spring air. After coming out of the church, he had seen, near the porch, the car lined with white satin, and its window reflecting the sunset, and behind the window there flashed on him for the last time the face of her who was being carried away from him for ever. After that he had wandered about in little streets, and had come out on the Novensky Boulevard. . . . Now slowly and with trembling hands he took off his overcoat, put on the table a paper bag containing two green cucumbers which for some reason he had bought at a hawker's stall. They too smelt of spring even through the paper, and spring-like through the upper pane of the window the April moon shone silvery high up in the not yet darkened sky. Kasimir Stanislavovitch lit a candle, sadly illuminating his empty, casual home, and sat down on the sofa, feeling on his face the freshness of evening. . . . Thus he sat for a long time. He did not ring the bell, gave no orders, locked himself in—all

this seemed suspicious to the porter who had seen him enter his room with his shuffling feet and taking the key out of the door in order to lock himself in from the inside. Several times the porter stole up on tiptoe to the door and looked through the key-hole: Kasimir Stanislavovitch was sitting on the sofa, trembling and wiping his face with a handkerchief, and weeping so bitterly, so copiously that the brown dye came off, and was smeared over his face.

At night he tore the cord off the blind, and, seeing nothing through his tears, began to fasten it to the hook of the clothes-peg. But the guttering candle flickered and the paper bag, and terrible dark waves swam and flickered over the locked room: he was old, weak—and he himself was well aware of it. . . . No, it was not in his power to die by his own hand!

In the morning he started for the railway station about three hours before the train left. At the station he quietly walked about among the passengers, with his eyes on the ground and tear-stained; and he would stop unexpectedly now before one and now before another, and in a low voice, evenly but without expression, he would say rather quickly:

"For God's sake . . . I am in a desperate position . . . . My fare to Briansk. . . . If only a few copecks. . . ."

And some passengers, trying not to look at his top-hat, at the worn velvet collar of his overcoat, at the dreadful face with the faded violet whiskers, hurriedly, and with confusion, gave him something.

And then, rushing out of the station on to the platform, he got mixed in the crowd and disappeared into it, while in the "Versailles," in the room which for two days had as it were belonged to him, they carried out

the slop-pail, opened the windows to the April sun and to the fresh air, noisily moved the furniture, swept up and threw out the dust—and with the dust there fell under the table, under the table cloth which slid on to the floor, his torn note, which he had forgotten with the cucumbers:

"I beg that no one be accused of my death. I was at the wedding of my only daughter who . . ."

# SUNSTROKE

They had had their dinner, and they left the brilliantly lighted dining-room and went on deck, where they paused by the rail. She closed her eyes and, palm turned outward, pressing her hand to her cheek, laughed with unaffected charm. Everything was charming about this little woman. She said:

"I'm quite intoxicated. . . . Or I've gone wholly out of my mind. Where did you drop down from? But three hours ago I scarcely suspected your existence. I don't even know where you came on board. Was it in Samarä? Well, it doesn't matter, my dear. Really, my head's in a whirl, or is it the boat turning?"

Before them was darkness—and lights. Out of the darkness a strong soft breeze blew in their faces, while the lights glided past them: with Volga friskiness the steamer cut a sharp curve, as it approached the small pier.

The lieutenant took her hand, lifting it to his lips. The strong small hand smelt of sunburn. Bliss and anguish caused his heart to grow tremulous at the thought that underneath this light linen dress she was doubtless all strong and tanned after a whole month's lying under the southern sun upon the hot sea sands (she had said she was coming from Anapu). The lieutenant murmured: "Let's get off here. . . ."

"Where?" she asked in astonishment.

"Here, on this pier."

"Why?"

He was silent. Again she laid the back of her hand upon her hot cheek.

"You're mad. . . ."

"Let's get off," he repeated dully. "I implore you. . . ."

"*Akh*, do as you like," she said, turning away.

The moving steamer crashed with a dull thud against the dimly lighted pier, and the pair almost fell upon each other. The end of a cable came flying above their heads, then the ship receded and the water clamorously seethed, the gang-plank rattled. . . . The lieutenant ran for the luggage.

Presently they passed through the tiny drowsy pier shed and, once out of doors, found themselves ankle-deep in sand; in silence they seated themselves in the dust-covered hackney cab. The ascent of the steep road, soft with dust, punctuated with infrequent lamp-posts standing awry, seemed endless. At last they emerged on top, the carriage rattled along a paved street; here was a square, some administrative buildings, a belfry, the warmth and the smells of a summer night in a provincial town. . . . The cabby stopped before a lighted entrance; through the open doors could be seen the steep wooden stairway. An old unshaven servant in a pink shirt and frock-coat reluctantly took their bags and went forward on his tired feet. They entered a large but terribly stuffy room still hot from the day's sun, its windows hung with white curtains, its mirror-topped mantelpiece decorated with two unused candles —and no sooner had they entered and the servant closed the door upon them than the lieutenant impetuously flung himself upon her and they both lost themselves in a kiss of such agonizing rapture that the moment was long to be remembered by them: nothing like it had

ever been experienced by either one or the other.

At ten o'clock the next morning, a morning hot and sunny and gay with the ringing of church bells, with the humming in the market-place facing the hotel, with the smell of hay and tar and all those complex odours with which every provincial Russian town reeks, she, this nameless little woman, for she refused to reveal her name, jestingly calling herself the lovely stranger, left him, resuming her journey. They had slept little, but when she emerged from behind the screen near the bed, within five minutes all washed and dressed, she looked as fresh as a seventeen-year-old girl. Was she embarrassed? Very little. As before, she was simple, gay and—quite rational.

"No, no, my dear," she said in response to his suggestion that they pursue the journey together. "No, you must remain here until the next boat. If we go on together, everything will be spoiled. I wouldn't like that. Please believe me, I'm not at all the sort of woman I may have led you to think. All that happened here never happened before and never will again. It's as if I suffered an eclipse. . . . Or, to be more precise, it's as if we both experienced something in the nature of a sunstroke. . . ."

The lieutenant rather lightly agreed with her. In gay happy spirits he escorted her in a carriage to the pier, which they reached just as the rose-tinted steamer was on the point of departure, and, on deck, in the presence of other passengers, he kissed her, and barely managed to jump on to the already receding gang-plank.

With the same lightness of spirit he returned to the hotel. Yet something had changed. Their room without her seemed quite different. It was still full of her—

and empty. That was strange! It still smelt of her excellent English eau-de-cologne, her unfinished cup was still on the tray, but she was no longer there. . . . And the lieutenant's heart suddenly felt such tremors of tenderness that he made haste to smoke and, slapping his boot-leg with a crop, he paced up and down the room.

"A strange occurrence!" he said aloud, laughing, yet conscious of tears in his eyes. " 'Please believe me, I'm not at all the sort of woman I may have led you to think . . . .' And now she's gone. . . . An absurd woman!"

The screen was pushed to one side, the bed had not yet been made. And he felt that now he simply hadn't the courage to look upon this bed. He arranged the screen around it, closed the window that he might avoid hearing the market hum and the creaking of cart wheels, lowered the blown-out white curtains, and sat down on the divan. . . . Well, so that was the end to the "chance encounter"! She was gone—and was now far away, doubtless sitting in the glassed-in white salon or on deck, gazing at the immense sun-glinting river, at the passing barges, the yellow sand-banks, the distant radiance of water and sky, at the whole immeasurable expanse of the Volga. . . . And farewell, for ever, for eternity. . . . For how could they ever meet again? "I can't, after all," he mused, "for one reason or another, visit the town where her husband is, and her three-year-old daughter, and the rest of her family, the place where she leads her everyday life!" —And that town suddenly appeared to him as a most exceptional, a forbidden town, and the thought that she would go on living in it her lonely life, perhaps frequently remembering him, remembering their chance transient encounter, while he

would never see her again, this thought stunned and unmanned him. No, this could not be! It was wholly absurd, unnatural, incredible! And he felt such anguish, such futility of existence in the years to come, that he was seized with terror, with despair.

"What the devil!" he thought, rising, and, again pacing up and down the room, he tried to avoid the sight of the bed behind the screen. "What's the matter with me? Who'd have thought it possible that the first time—and there. . . . What is there about her, and what exactly has happened? Really, it is as if it were some sort of sunstroke! But the main thing is, how am I to spend the whole day without her in this God-forsaken place?"

He vividly remembered her as she was, with all her most intimate traits; he remembered the smell of her sunburn and of her linen dress, of her strong body, the live, simple, gay sound of her voice. . . . The mood of but lately experienced delights of her feminine loveliness, was still singularly strong upon him; nevertheless, the main thing was another altogether new mood —that strange, incomprehensible mood, non-existent while they were still together, a mood which he could not have even imagined yesterday, when he first made this new, merely diverting, as he had thought, acquaintance, and concerning which he could no longer speak to anyone, no, not to anyone! "Yes, the main thing," he went on thinking, "is that you'll never be able to talk about it! And what is one to do, how is one to pass this endless day, with these memories, with this intolerable anguish, in this God-forsaken little town by that same radiant Volga, upon whose waters this rose-tinted steamer has borne her away!"

It was necessary to save himself, to occupy himself

with something, to find amusement, to go somewhere. He resolutely put his cap on; strode vigorously, clinking his spurs, down the empty corridors; ran down the steep stairway toward the entrance. . . . Well, where should he go? At the entrance was a young cabby in a smart peasant's coat, calmly smoking a tiny cigar, apparently waiting for someone. The lieutenant glanced at him in distraught wonder: how was it possible for anyone to sit so calmly on a coach-box, and smoke, and seem so unconcerned, so indifferent? "Evidently, in this whole town I alone am so terribly unhappy," he thought, turning in the direction of the market-place.

The market was dispersing. Unwittingly he trod upon the fresh manure among the wagons, among the cart-loads of cucumbers, among the new pots and pans, and the women, who sat on the ground, vied with one another in trying to call his attention to their pots, which they took in their hands and made ring with their fingers, demonstrating their quality, while the peasants dinned in his ears: "Here are first-class cucumbers, Your Honor!" All this was stupid, absurd, and he ran from the place. He entered the church, where chanting was going on; it was loud and cheerful and determined, as if the chanters were conscious of the fulfilment of a duty; then he strode on through the streets, and in the heat of the sun wandered along the paths of a tiny neglected garden on the slope of a hill, overlooking the broad river with its splendour as of glinting steel. The shoulder-straps and buttons of his white summer uniform grew so hot that it was impossible to touch them. The inner band of his cap was wet with perspiration, his face flamed. . . .

On returning to the hotel he found delicious relief in

the shelter of the large, empty, cool dining-room; he removed his cap, sat down at a little table before an open window, through which the heat blew—a breeze for all that—and ordered an iced soup of pot-herbs. Everything was good, in everything there was immeasurable happiness, intense joy, even in this sultriness and in these market smells; in the whole unfamiliar little town and in this old provincial hotel it was present, this happiness, and, with it all, his heart was simply being rent into shreds. He drank several small glasses of vodka, and made a snack of pickled cucumbers, and he felt that without the least faltering he would choose to die tomorrow, if only by some miracle he could return her and spend but this one day with her—if only to have a chance to tell her and somehow prove to her, persuade her of his harrowing and marvellous love. . . . But why prove it to her? Why persuade her? He could not tell why, yet it seemed more necessary than life itself.

"My nerves are playing me pranks!" he thought, as he poured himself a fifth glass of vodka.

He consumed an entire small decanter, hoping in intoxication to forget, to bring to an end his agonized exultation. But no, it only grew more intense.

He pushed away the cold herb soup, asked for black coffee, and began to smoke and resolutely to deliberate upon ways and means of freeing himself from this unexpected, sudden love. But to free himself—he felt this acutely—was impossible. And, suddenly, with a rapid movement, he rose, picked up his cap and crop, and, asking where the post-office was, quickly went in the direction indicated, with the phrasing of a telegram already in his head: "Henceforth my life is wholly yours, unto death, to do with what you will." On

reaching the thick-walled house, which sheltered the post and telegraph office he paused in horror: he knew the town where she lived, he knew that she had a husband and a three-year-old daughter, but he knew neither her first name nor her surname! Several times in the course of the evening he had asked her, and each time she laughed and said:

"Why must you know who I am? I am Maria Green, Fairyland Queen. . . . Or simply the lovely stranger. . . . Isn't that enough for you?"

On the corner, near the post-office, was a photographic show-case. He looked steadily at a large portrait of a military man with elaborate epaulettes, with bulging eyes and low forehead, with surprisingly magnificent whiskers and expansive chest, all decorated with orders. . . . How absurdly ridiculous, how horribly ordinary it all was, because his heart had been vanquished—yes, vanquished, he understood it now—by this terrible 'sunstroke', this intense love, this intense happiness! He glanced at a bridal couple—a young man in a long frock-coat and white neck-tie, his hair cut in hedge-hog style; on his arm, in bridal veil,—but he then diverted his gaze to the portrait of a good-looking, spirited girl in a student's cap perched awry. . . . Then, tormented by a harrowing envy toward all these strangers, *non-suffering* human beings, he began to look fixedly down the street.

"Where can I go? What can I do!" the insoluble, oppressive question persisted in his mind and soul.

The street was deserted. The houses were all alike, white, two-storied, middle-class, with large gardens, and they gave the appearance of being uninhabited; a thick white dust covered the pavement; all this dazzled; everything was drenched with the hot, flaming, joyous,

seemingly aimless sunshine. In the distance the street rose, humped and pressed against the pure, cloudless, grayish horizon, reflecting lilac. There was something southern in this, reminiscent of Sebastopol, Kertch . . . Anapu. The thought of the last was particularly unbearable. And the lieutenant, with lowered head, screwing up his eyes against the light, with fixed gaze on the ground, reeling, stumbling, spur catching on spur, retraced his footsteps.

He returned to the hotel, shattered with fatigue, as if he had performed a long journey in Turkestan or the Sahara. Gathering his last strength, he entered his large, desolate room. The room had already been cleaned, and her last traces removed–only a solitary hair-pin, forgotten by her, lay on the tiny table by the bed! He took off his jacket and glanced in the mirror: his face–the ordinary face of an officer, swarthy from sunburn, with whitish sun-bleached moustaches and bluish-white eyes, seeming against the sunburn whiter than they were–now showed a distraught, insane expression, and in his thin white shirt with standing starched collar there was something youthful and infinitely pathetic. He lay down on the bed, on his back, and rested his dust-covered boots on the footboard. The windows were open, the curtains lowered, and from time to time the light breeze filled them, blowing into the room sultriness and the odour of hot roofs and of all that luminous, now quite desolate, mute, unpeopled world of the Volga. He lay with his arms under his head and gazed fixedly into space. His head held the dim picture of the remote south, of the sun, the sea, Anapu, and it was something fabulous–as if the town to which she had gone, the town in which she had

doubtless already arrived, was like no other town—and with it all there ripened the persistent thought of suicide. He closed his eyes, and felt on his cheeks the trickle of pungent, hot tears—and at last fell asleep. When he again opened his eyes there was already visible, through the curtains, the darkening reddish evening sun. The breeze had died down, the room was stuffy and dry, as in a wind-furnace. . . . And he remembered yesterday and this morning precisely as if they had been ten years ago.

In no great haste he rose, in no great haste washed himself; then he pulled the curtains aside, rang for the servant, asked for a samovar and his bill, and for a long time he drank tea with lemon. Then he ordered a cab and had his luggage taken out, and, seating himself in the reddish, burnt-out seat of the carriage, he gave the servant a whole five roubles as a tip.

"It looks, Your Honor, as though I brought you here last night!" said the cabby cheerfully, as he seized the reins.

When they reached the pier, the blue summer night already darkened above the Volga and many varicoloured flames were scattered upon the river and the flames hung in the mast of the approaching steamer.

"Got you here just in time!" said the cabby ingratiatingly.

The lieutenant also gave him too, five roubles, then with ticket in hand went to the pier. . . . Even as yesterday there was the soft sound of the hawsers, and the light dizziness from the vacillation under foot; then came the flying end of the cable, the clamour of the seething waters under the wheels of the steamer receding from the impact. . . . And the sight of the much-peopled

steamer, ablaze with light, and the smells of its kitchens, seemed to extend a warm welcome.

Another minute, and the steamer was under way, going up the river, in the direction in which it had borne her away that same morning.

Ahead of it, the dark summer sunset was rapidly fading; gloomily, dreamily and iridescently, it was reflected in the river, showing patches glimmering with tremulous ripples in the distance under the sunset, and the flames scattered in the darkness round the steamer went on receding and receding.

The lieutenant sat under cover on deck, conscious of having aged by ten years.

# A SIMPLE PEASANT

It was Lubka's second winter at the home of the land-owners Panin, in Izvaly, when Ignat was hired on the estate as cowherd.

He was in his twenty-first year, she in her twentieth. He came from a poor family in Chesmenka, one of the villages composing Izvaly; she from a like one in Shatilovo, not many versts from Izvaly. It was said of her, though, that she was half "blue-blood," an illegitimate daughter of the Shatilovo proprietor. Furthermore, in all the duties of her daily work, Lubka, as house maid, rubbed shoulders with the gentlefolk. Because of this, the more the young herdsman burned for the beauty of the girl, the shyer he became. And the shyer he became, the more he thought of her, the more sullen and silent he grew.

Lubka's eyes were black and bright, frank and almost criminally clear. From her mistress, a graying widow who smoked thin, scented cigarettes, she stole, deftly and quietly, both soap and perfume. At times lively and naive, she looked younger than her twenty years, at other times older, a woman who had tasted everything. Before she was fourteen she was raped by the old rake Zybin, the district commissioner of Shatilovo; and now she permitted a lot to the two young masters of the Panin place without any fear of losing her head. But to Ignat, who as yet did not know women, the relations between men and women were becoming more frightening and desirable. In all of Izvaly, indeed, there was not a more

complex, secretive fellow than this Ignat. Even riding in his work cart directly to the grain sheds to get straw for the animals, he would never answer openly to the simple question, "Where are you going?" And, avoiding Lubka's glances, without raising his sullen eyes, ashamed of his ragged open-fibre, cloth-wrapped shoes, his worn cap and tattered coat, he would watch her from beneath his eyebrows. And her calm shamelessness, which he dimly understood, awed and fascinated him.

The behavior of the two young masters of the estate also increased Ignat's love. . . . The two of them—Alexis Kuzmich, an officer who had already spent some time in the Caucasus for a certain delicate, private treatment, a man the same age as Ignat, and Nikolai, the younger, the same age as Lubka, a lad who had shifted frequently from one institution of learning to another—came home during the winter season only on the great holidays. This year the younger squire had come home first, to celebrate *Maslenitsa.* Lubka was unusually animated and went about with a particularly frank and open air, without, however, being frank with anyone. Her self-possessed eyes sparkled, and heightened spots appeared in her swarthy cheeks. Dark-haired, strong, working her elbows, swishing her white starched apron, she rushed about in a green woollen dress, from one thing to another, from the servants' quarters to the house and from the house to the servants' quarters, over the trodden path through the snow-filled yard. During the Shrovetide, when the holiday smoke rose from the chimneys above the firs and pines in the garden, standing gloomy and dull in the gray days, Ignat could not avoid witnessing more than once the play of the young masters with the girl.

Once, at dusk she flew out of the house with an angry, flushed face, her hair streaming behind her. Nikolai Kuzmich, laughing and shouting something, ran out onto the steps after her. And there he stood on the thawing stoop, a stoutish fellow, big-headed, with a dull and authoritative profile, in his white silk blouse and patent-leather boots.

That night, later, Lubka, gay again and panting, bumped into Ignat in the dark hall of the servants' quarters.

She stopped for an instant, before racing on.

"He tore my petticoat and he gave me a whole bottle of Persian Wisteria," she said, unexpectedly. "Here, smell that!"

And in a second she was gone.

The herdsman stood, rooted to the spot, dully staring into the darkness, a darkness heavy with the smells of the kitchen, of dog-smell from the animals whose eyes glittered like twin garnets as they passed in and out of the hallway; but he was alive only to the overpowering sweet fragrance of the perfume and the still more overpowering odour of hair, of carnation pomade, and the woollen dress with perspiration under the arms. . . .

Then Alexis Kuzmich, the officer, came home—lean, with sharp, brown eyes, a long, pale grayish face flecked with powdered red pimples. Her hair freshly waved, her body pinched into a tight-fitting corset, Lubka's mistress came heavily out upon the steps by the drive, her flesh shaking as she walked. And as the bells of the *troika* tinkled gaily from the hill-road, she waved her handkerchief, continually, until the driver reined in at the door. The young officer, bawling something in a loud and imperious tone, and apparently

not deigning to notice whether anyone listened or not, threw aside the fur lap robe with a flourish one sees in front of some fashionable restaurant, and ran up the steps, lithe and easy in his movements, his legs very thin and somewhat bowed in his small, shiny boots, his silver spurs clinking. With a jerk of his shoulders, he adjusted the wide Nokolayevsky military coat with its high beaver collar.

It was Ash Wednesday Eve. The holiday had come late this winter, and at times the weather gave a hint that spring was pushing northward. From early morning the sun shone, the blue skies reflecting from the snow, and the long icicles around the house dripping into puddles on the ground. But early in the afternoon, the day turned sullen, raw and penetrating. The garden near the house darkened and turned chill, brooding in the early shadows. Unmindful of the rawness and the wind, Lubka kept on dragging in packages from the officer's sled. The cowherd watched her, watched the way her body moved.

He stood on the wide, dirty landing before the peasants' quarters, the place odorous of pancake smoke. Large flakes of snow were falling, instantly thawing. In front of the threshold of the house, before the steps, a number of newly arrived rooks walked through a puddle, strutting with importance. A peasant and the woman cook, her skirt tucked inside her belt, showing a man's high boots, carried out of the quarters a huge tub, a stick through its handles. Thick yellow mash steamed in the tub. The wolf-hounds appeared suddenly, in a pack, shaking and hunched together, their tails hanging between their legs, and began devouring the feed. The cook's boy, in a red, holiday shirt, stirred the mash with a spade, occasionally lifting it out of the tub to

strike at the crowding dogs as they pushed and growled. The yard was already showing bare spots where the earth here and there was darkening through the snow.

The dogs withdrew from the tub, finished, their snouts covered with the yellow mash, and rolled and rubbed themselves on the ground, and then streaked out through the yard toward the garden behind the house. Side by side with the beautiful Strelka, the black-eyed Borzoi with the silky white fur, ran a large red house dog, ferociously showing its teeth, growling and choking, and preventing the other wolf-hounds from coming near her. Ignat, impelled by desires, followed after the dogs. But in the alley they all turned off, bounding over the path under the gnarled old apple trees until they disappeared. Ignat went on, through the house garden and into the wide fields. The snow was driving down obliquely. He removed his cap, and from its torn cotton lining he dug out a cherished 20-kopeck piece.

Along the garden wall he went, through many back fields, and on toward the village which showed its darkly thawed-out hut-roofs on the hill. The snow along the way lay in mounds, yellowish, rutted with sled runners, the droppings of horses pounded in the tracks running green with water in the tramped ground between the huts and out-buildings. At the window of a particularly bleak and unhealthy-looking hovel, under whose walls a few chickens dozed with their heads under their wings, Ignat knocked. A yellowish old face flattened itself against the inside of the pane. Ignat held up the 20-kopeck piece. The old woman pulled on a pair of heavy, ragged felt boots, covered her head with a short pelt and led Ignat across the road into a shed with a strong iron door. She shoved a bottle into the deep pants pocket

which he held open.

Behind the sheds on the slope of the wind-blown hill, he stood in the snow, thinking of Lubka. Then, throwing his head back, he drank the contents of the bottle to the final drop, without a breath. He hid the empty bottle in the snow, feeling the poison course hot and pleasant through his entire body. He squatted in the snow, awaiting the effect to come. In a moment or two he relaxed, falling back upon the ground, laughing in the joy of his drunkenness, and crawled up the hill into a deserted meadow.

When, later, he came to his senses, he stared about him for a long time, straining to realize where he was. He felt himself weightless and small. He was frozen through. A raw wind blew. It was getting dark and the snow had stopped. With sudden fear, he remembered that he had not yet brought in the straw to start the morning fires, for it was one of his chores to bring piles of it every evening to the back of the house, placing it in readiness in the space beneath the steps. He sprang up and ran through the village, and through the garden near the house. His head was heavy, but his body light, all his senses strangely sharpened, sharpened more by the wind against his face. It was a sweet wind; one felt like swallowing it with a full chest. He remembered now, too, that he had forgotten a rope on the back steps, and panting and splashing his heavy shoes along the wet snow, he veered from the path to the house. In the half light, under the steps, stood a man, squeezing someone to the wall. Hearing Ignat's steps, he turned upon him.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

It was Alexis Kuzmich—his voice, his long pale face,

his long narrow head, close-cropped in the military style. Lubka, pressed against the wall, held the officer by two fingers, and did not release his hand. The herdsman backed off, his eyes riveted to her apron. He stood for a moment in the yard, then slouched away, again feeling a pain in his stomach and a weakness in his shoulders and his legs. Rain clouds hung over the garden in sullen dark whorls. The rising western wind rippled the black puddles, and there was in the air a soft, intoxicating moistness, the growing strength of an early spring challenging the winter.

The following day winter conquered, snow fell thickly, and toward evening the fields were lost behind the curtains of the storm. Lubka's lady drove out to call upon a neighbouring estate. Alexis, his military spurs clanking, stepped out on the back steps and shouted across the yard to hitch up Korolek. Bending over the dogs, which hung about the stoop, snow on their backs and heads, the officer petted and played with one after another, scratching behind their ears, and shaking them passionately, teasing and muttering nonsense to them through his bared teeth.

Lubka, carrying a dish of fish to the servant quarters, passed by him. He gave her a side glance, and lunged among the dogs. "Ah, you pups, you devils, you," he shouted.

It was the last day before Lent. Over the hill, from as far off as the river, came the sound of voices, songs, drunken shouts, the tinkle of sleigh bells and the ringing and the booming of the larger bell of the village. The village shop-keeper, the shoemaker, the policeman, the peasants, all were sledding with their guests, their ladies, maids and relatives. It was gay and sad. One could feel

both the peak and the finish of the holiday. When the horse, Korolek, was hitched, the officer, in a smart gray little coat with fur cap, went into the house and came out again, pulling the laughing Lubka, who was beaming now and rouged. She wore a fur coat with a cheap brown collar and a green dress pinned up above her boots. Her head was bound around with a gray shawl and, bobbing with laughter and good spirits, she stomped down the steps. Ignat, having brought up Korolek, held the ginger-colored colt by the bit, as the young animal pawed the driveway, flashing a wicked eye sideways at the officer's bright silk scarf which showed from under his collar. His neck was thin and covered with half-healed pimples and scars. Ignat's eyes were dropped to the level of Lubka's white skirt, to her rough half-boots oiled with lard. . . . As he dragged off later in his work sled towards the barns, he held hard the lead-rope in his hands, and with it belabored the lean, bony back of his nag. Korolek, snorting his vitality, the fresh snow driving in his face and into his hot nostrils, little bullets of hard snow flying from his hoofs and clicking against the dashboard, sailed on by, covering the herdsman and his nag with the dancing veil of his breath, and grew smaller and smaller in the distant blurr descending whitely on the fields. The snow fell in huge flakes upon the sleek back of the well-fed Korolek, and on the fur cap, the shoulder-straps, the shiny small boots with the silver spurs braced against the sled's iron footrail. In his left hand, in a suède glove, the officer held the pale blue reins. With the other he suddenly reached for the head in the gray shawl and pressed his fur cap against it. . . .

And Ignat decided, definitely, to swap his accordion, his sole treasure, with Yashka, the workman, for a pair

of old boots. When he had finished hauling the straw and firewood, he did not go into the village streets to join the throng which crowded together in a dark cluster under the roof of the last hut near the church. There, accordions vied with one another, gaily and madly, all of them drowned in turn by the wind and the songs. The peasant square was ringed with smoke and whirling girls were dancing through the air like witches. But Ignat, sinking heavily in the snow and slush, pulled himself past the square toward the brightly lighted house of the village shop-keeper, and stood there for two hours, his eyes glued on the snow-rimmed window in whose bright golden square the passing shadows showed the movements of the dancers.

## II

Lent was gray and monotonous.

A cruel wind blew day after day, the fields stood white and pale, the dark firs and pines sang their sad song in the blue-shadowed garden, and the rooks, which had arrived too early, went into hiding. The officer, Alexis Kuzmich, had long since ended his visit home and departed. But Nikolai Kuzmich tarried on. Once Ignat drove his work sled up to the back steps of the house. The sled scraped the side of the steps, bumping open the storm-door hanging ajar, and the young master, who was under the steps with Lubka, rose from the piled straw, laughing. Lubka, fixing her hair, looked out serenely.

"It's all play to you," she said. "But the whole village will soon be barking. Ignat," she stared at the young herdsman, "why don't you make a wife out of me?"

Ignat blushed and frowned. He made not the slightest retort to her words, but from that day on jealousy and envy began to grow within him. Chewing his black bread, he jogged his cart along the road to the granary, giving the manor house a sidewise glance because he knew only too well what was going on within it. The dogs tore after him, a bouncing brown pack. From the old manure heaps came the squeak and scurry of mice, and the dogs, rooting in the straw, smelling and sniffing, quivering and whining, would suddenly pounce on their prey, rapacious and precise. At the granary, Ignat would coax in the soft sleek Strelka, the dog with the eyes so limpid and feminine. Once inside, he would shut tight the creaking doors. The air was thin with the cold smell of earth and the faintly warm scent of golden wheat stalks. Across the half darkness of the immense triangle above him, along the eaves, the beams and crossbeams of which were covered with a thick gray layer of velvet dust from the last summer's threshing, a cold pale light cut through the long crack of the doors. The wind swished against them, and swept along the threshing floor. . . .

On a clear, sunny day of his third week at home Nikolai Kuzmich departed. Spring had come on suddenly. The straw-thatched roofs of the barns and the outhouses thawed in a day and the old gray thatch shone like gold in the sun, contrasting brightly with the high blue sky which softened the soul. The young colts and cows, still fuzzy with their winter coats, napped and basked in the sunshine. The damp, thawing snow glistened sharp and silvery. A *troika* stood by the guest entrance in the shade, beside a blue puddle. The puddle reflected both the sky and Lubka's white apron. Out of the house came Nikolai Kuzmich, his fur coat thrown over his

short jacket. With him walked his mother, the lady of the manor. They said good-bye many times over, and from the sled the young man turned back to shout farewells. The runners slushed through the trembling little rivulets of melting snow, dotted with the manure accumulations of winter, now like wet tobacco. Wherever water shone in the ruts, the thin-legged horses, with their tails smartly tied in knots, flashed the steel of their shoes with showy smartness. It was warm in the sun. Chattering rooks perched in the branches of the firs near the house, the trees now flaring freshly green. But in the shade one still felt a little of the keen north wind. Lubka, on the steps, stood chilled, her cheeks tinged bluish. . . . The sled disappeared beyond the hill. She hummed, thoughtfully, *"Just a couple in a troika."* . . . Then pulled herself together, and turned into the house. A little later and she was outside on the back steps. Ignat, who was at work in the yard, came over to her. Dully, without moving, she looked at him. He came up close and suddenly took her by the wrists. At once they were both confused. Half in play, pulling and tugging, their hands tangled together, neither knew what to say. Suddenly Lubka frowned.

"Here," she said. "Let go! . . . What nerve!"

And pulling away from him, she went inside and slammed the door.

Alone, outside, the yard seemed despairingly chill and bare, its winter-bitten trees and bushes lost in the lonely shadows of the dusk. The open path seemed wide and inviting. And once more Ignat, glowering and mean, trudged along the pathway to the village, to the old woman who sold the vodka. And once more he woke up in the dusk, in the meadow, frozen to the bone,

amazed. Over him stood a sentinelled tree, brooding at his guilt, drooping long moustachios of hoar frost, a silhouette against the lowering sun. Beyond the hill, the sky loomed vast without limit.

"I'm no match for her," he said, grimly getting to his feet. "I'm done for."

From that evening on he never looked at the house when he jogged by toward the barns and sheds. He never answered Lubka when she spoke to him. Lent ended, and so the Holy Week, too. No more snow remained except in the shaded gulleys and a light lemon down appeared on the willows near the villages; around the villages the blue-black plow lands stretched immense, the sun beat warm, glassy rays trembled on the horizon, larks sang high in the air, and the green-damp paths, the furrows and the roads were drying out. Fresh smelling grass pushed through the earth. Ignat had long since begun driving his herds to the pastures through the Miliutin woods, which still stood winter-stripped and barren, but providing, under foot, a bed of dried oak leaves, sprinkled with snowdrops. The cows mooned lazily in the clearing where the sun shone warmest. There was nothing for them to eat; they lay on the ground, patiently, and the rooks settled on their very backs, brazenly picking loose hair for their nests. Ignat wove a new whip, idly gazing into the sunny distance, and seeing the roads already covered with the dust which pleasantly suggested summer. His stolid young features were tanning in the dry, windless April days.

He was happy when he had money. Choosing a dry spot in the field, he spread out his torn, tattered coat, placed the bottle on it, pulled the soggy bread from his pocket, and the cold boiled potatoes. Soon his head

began to swim blissfully. The sunny southern horizon beyond the graying steppes quivered, a thin stream rising blue above the baked manure heaps strewn over the fields. The cows swam pleasantly in the haze. Strange . . . he was still expecting something! Drunk, he still felt it; he felt his life had become tied up with Lubka's life—to his own undoing. Something must be done—to conquer her, to become her equal, to call out her love. Otherwise, even though he had his will of her, she would not love a simple peasant. . . . And the spring clamoured for love. Trembling, first on the foreknees, then awkwardly raising their backs, one cow after another got to its feet. . . . The giant bull, his broad forehead shaggy with hair, came lumbering toward them, shaking glassy threads of spittle at his jowls, and, suddenly, swelling with power, reared on his hind legs. Ignat's heart stopped within him. He fell backward against the dry black earth. His eyes were closed, tears rolling from under his eye-lashes. He did not wipe them off, and flies buzzed and settled on them. He fell asleep and lay there until the sun, straight above him, baked his head and shoulders and awakened him. Afterward, he drove the herd back to the barns, ate in the peasant quarters without words, and went off to sleep in the carriage shed, where, against the stone wall, stood a high bedstead, knocked together with old boards and covered with straw and the rags of a red cotton quilt. After his night's sleep, he rose mean and sullen and drove out the herd, beating the cows so hard with his long cracking whip that welts formed on their backs.

He made up his mind to behave in such a way that would make the overseer beat him and discharge him from the estate. The coming summer, the inevitable

return of the two young masters of the place—all of it frightened him; some time he might lose his head and from the corner of the house crack open the skull of Lubka or Nikolai with a brick! But, as it happened, one day, in May, when the woods were already flourishing a rich green growth, and flowers were twinkling from the grass, when even in the early morning it turned summer-like in the open meadows, and lilies-of-the-valley were emerging in the fresh dewy shadows, he saw a woman sitting in the clearing as he reached the pasture grounds. It was the pauper, the half-wit Thiona. Her burlap bag and stick beside her, she sat, all in tatters, her mouth agape, the lower part of her skirt wet, her eyes glistening in her puffed face. She was slightly drunk. When Ignat came up, she fell over backward with a repressed passionate giggle, baring her knees, and began to rub her big wrapped shoes along the grass. The burlap sack beside her contained both cake and vodka. And when he drank, Ignat let himself go. . . .

From then on, the half-wit began coming to the field almost daily. Waking at nights, he strained at times to cry: it was insulting, it pained him to think that he lived with a half-wit! He drove out his herd before the sunrise, in the cold, heavy dew. . . . At noon he drank. Now they both drank on his money. He drew his pay a month in advance. But even that came at last to an end. Thiona became angry, impudent, exacting; she no longer feigned being a half-wit. When Ignat came without vodka, she denied him, starved him, a week on end. Once she even cracked him over the head with her stick, ably and hard. He rose and slouched away, strangely and awkwardly weeping. His tears ended, he sat on a path and dully thought of the same old thing, of which he now thought continuously:

where to get money? But there was no place to get it, no place to steal it. Already he'd drunk away his boots.

All the peasants on the place knew his story, and often they jibed at him at meal times. He turned deep red and kept silent. Suppose, now, Lubka heard of this. . . . But, lucky for him, the young masters did not come back. It was rumoured that Nikolai Kuzmich was visiting a friend near Kharkoff, that the officer, Alexis, was engaged in manoeuvres near Smolensk. And the lady of the manor herself was off for six weeks to Lipetsk and took Lubka with her. The place lapsed quiet and boring. The half-wit's visits became rarer and rarer—she chased from one village fair to another. The summer was nearing its end, hot and long. The river shallowed out, the cattle crunched through all the forage left, the black soil showed through the close-clipped stalks. The grain was ready, the wheat dried and fell to the ground. They began taking in the harvest. It was the end of July.

At the end of July, returning at sunset with his herd to the village, Ignat met the half-wit. She stopped and pointed to the woods.

"When I'm done, I'll come," he said, without raising his eyes.

But, to go without vodka? He stood sadly at the gates of the estate, looking toward the falling sun. Along the road, cutting slantwise over the hill, the peasants and their women, on dusty carts, were rattling home from the fields, the scythes, flails and rakes stuck out from the slats of the carts. The sun, the colour of a raspberry, set, a vast and rayless globe, upon the dry purple haze beyond the river, beyond the fields already covered with links of sheaves. Ignat pushed through the gates, cut through the field, then past the garden toward the grain

sheds. Ahead of him a dirty, curly-headed little girl kicked her small feet through the dust. Straining with its weight, she carried in her right hand a pail filled with freshly bought tar. Ignat quickened his pace to catch up with her, he glanced back, and then grabbed her tiny left hand in which she was tinkling some small coins. Her eyes went round with terror, her face twisted, and she screamed and tightened her fist, resisting like a little cornered beast. Ignat seized her by the throat and threw her on the ground. The child choked for breath and opened her fingers. He raked the money from her palm. Thirty kopecks.

Having bought the vodka, he went straight toward the woods. To the right was the cut harvest, the sheaves standing faintly light in the dusk. From his left a warm wind blew off the black ploughed land, from the steppes. Ahead of him, above the dark fringe of the woods, Mars, red and huge, was rising. The cowherd stopped, suddenly, on the road. He recalled that it was today the lady of the estate was expected home, that a *troika* had been sent along the highroad for her and a peasant cart sent also to the station for her luggage. And soon, indeed, holding his breath to catch the sound, he heard the distant music of the harness bells.

All during the summer it had seemed to him that he might somehow escape the inevitable something which was to be. But now, he knew it really could not be done, he could not escape. It was coming nearer, looming larger as it came. . . . He stood for a time in the road, then went on.

At the crossroads he was deafened by the bells, the clattering of the horses, and the dust in the wake of the *troika* flew in clouds about his face. From farther down

the road came the familiar rumble of the peasant cart. It was getting nearer. And a minute later Ignat saw on the dull starry sky the silhouetted yoke above the horse, the horse itself, and behind it Lubka, sitting in the cart. She slipped the reins over the horse's back and bumped up and down, rushing straight down upon him.

"Climb in! I'll give you a lift on home!" she sang out gaily, recognizing Ignat in the dusk.

He turned and caught up with the heavily loaded cart and hopped up, sideways, to sit along the sideboards.

What Lubka talked about, he did not remember. He remembered only the first words, which struck him to the heart. Lightly, her deep voice like a song to him, drowning the rumbling of the cart, she cried:

"Well! Have you missed me much?"

He remembered only that moment when he suddenly seized the reins, and, pulling in the horses, he threw his legs inside the cart.

"Wait!" whispered Lubka, as simply as if they had lived together for many years. And this simplicity made his head swim. "Wait! You'll ruin my skirt, honey. Let me fix it. . . ."

III

Four years went by. It was December. Ignat, having served the four-year military period required of those who reach twenty-one, was returning from the city of Vasilkoff to his home village.

He had lived only three months with his wife. Soon after that July night when his fate had taken such a sudden turn, Lubka felt that she was pregnant; and the evil thought never left him that this had been the only reason she had married him. She told him she loved him,

she found a job for his father, a sick old man, getting him work as herdsman on the estate; Ignat she clothed and equipped for his journey to his regiment, and at the station she saw him off with tears. . . . He beat her badly while he amused himself by showing off his new uniform to the whole village before he left, and, beating her, avenged himself for the young masters before him. She even dropped the child, miscarriage from the beating, but accepted it all as well-deserved. When they took him away to Vasilkoff with the recruits, she often enclosed money in her letters to him, and wrote him sweetly. But he did not believe a single word, lived in anxiety, in sadness, in continuous suffering, in jealousy, inventing the most truculent punishments for her imagined unfaithfulness.

On his furlough home two years before the end of his service, he had planned, all the way back, to kill her, if he should learn anything bad. On his arrival in the village he had made many inquiries. He learned that Lubka refused only the lazy ones. But she met him with such joy, denied all rumours with such simplicity and frankness, that his tensed arm fell to his side. In order to quiet him entirely, she said she was leaving her work on the Panin estate, and was going to move to their hut by herself, where she would wait patiently for his return, working in the meantime on a sewing machine and feeding herself that way. And he left for his regiment again, downcast, puzzled. Downcast and silent he remained for all his service, but efficient, accurate and thrifty, saving his pay, and any little bribes from fellow soldiers. He still had the hope of becoming the equal of Lubka, of becoming worthy of her real and unfeigned love. But suddenly her letters ceased. He wrote almost

every week. No answer. He threatened, begged. She was silent. He began again to drink, and became dull and tired.

Nevertheless, his soldiering finished, he went back to Izvaly.

He had changed very much. He was thin now, tall and quite handsome. His leaden eyes were larger, his face seemed grayer and leaner. He shaved often. His reddish moustache was cut like a brush, his hair trimmed in the military "porcupine" style, and the skin of his scalp was visible through his short wiry hair. From Kieff to Orel he sat motionless in the train near his rough wooden trunk, which was painted walnut colour, his boots and tea-kettle tied to the straps. He removed neither his cap nor the rough military coat which chafed his neck, gazed constantly at the floor and crunched on sunflower seeds. From Orel on he began to worry, and went to the refreshment stand at every station. In the railroad station of his native village, he ran into a former service comrade, had drinks, and left his trunk with the guard. The two quit the station and hired an old coachman who drove them, with the utmost speed of which his three-legged mare was capable, into the heart of the town. The two were excited and smoked one cigarette after another. They drove into the notorious district, where Ignat stayed for almost twenty-four hours with a small, short-legged, middle-aged brunette, who smoked with even more fervour than he. He came to himself in a field near the district, and with difficulty recalled that he had been severely beaten before they had kicked him out. It was a soft, white day; it snowed and the flakes stuck in the folds of his coat. He got up, shaky, feeling as sick as if he had been poisoned. . . .

To the village of Izvaly he was forced to ride in a

freight car, together with a consignment of hogs which were so fat they sank on their tails, unable to stand. The hogs were destined for a wealthy landowner as breeding stock, and they were accompanied by the landowner's ancient gardener, a neat and quiet man, a former household servant. Besides the gardener, Ignat and the hogs, there was another passenger, a Jew, gray, curly-haired, large-headed and bearded, wearing glasses and a stovepipe hat and a long coat trailing to his ankles, navy blue in some places and sky blue in others, a coat with low-cut pockets. He was silent all the way, looked thoughtfully concerned, hummed some melody, and drank tea. The gardener napped. The hogs swayed on their haunches behind the wooden partition, over them a gray cloth blanket with crown and crest. It was getting dark, the wind and snow blew into the open door and whirred the damp straw off the floor. Flat white fields swept by, a slowly settling band of engine smoke riding with them, level with the train, like a hedge.

A heavy feeling of anxiety pressed on Ignat. He tied and retied his orange-trimmed neckpiece, his brow darkened, his teeth ground as his jaws moved up and down. He stood by the door, chewing sunflower seeds and looking sidewise at the Jew. The Jew sat on a box turned upside down, holding a glass of tea in a large hand swollen with veins. The seed shells blew in the wind and some fell into the tea. The Jew looked up at Ignat through his spectacles. Ignat waited for the Jew to say something so that he could drive a boot into his stomach. But the Jew said nothing; only arose and poured the tea out, purposely near Ignat's feet in their flat and spacious military boots.

At the station where he got out in the darkness, Ignat

found no fellow-travellers bound for his village. He was forced to sit and wait for the chance of someone to turn up. His hands were ice-cold, his head swam. It was half-past ten when the outline of the station had risen in front of him with its familiar walls and lighted windows. The passenger train had just pulled out. In the third-class waiting-room, cold and badly lit, heavy with smoke and body odours, one was forced to use one's elbows to get through, so many peasants were crowded in. Every minute the door squeaked open, slammed, and a fresh frosty gust of air rushed through the sullen waiting room, lifting the whirls of steam above the samovar in the main room. From the brighter illuminated ticket office and telegraph room there came without cessation the dribbling sound of a bell, as if someone had wound up an alarm clock and forgotten to turn it off. And in this crowded, ringing room, Ignat's temples throbbed.

He made inquiries here and there for fellow-travellers, walked about dully like a lunatic, but saw and noticed everything with an unusual clearness. The throng of coats and peasant pelts was thinning out. He went out on the station steps, allowing the others to pass him, stepping sideways before those ahead of him, staring at horses and sleds and at the cloud-flecked, moonlit skies. He smoked a cigarette, deeply breathing in the sweet winter air, together with the smoke, and returned, finally, to get his trunk. The refreshment counter man had already stripped his counter bare, piece by piece he had removed the oranges, cigarettes, the plates of sausage and the lone piece of sweaty cheese. The station master was leading by the arm a large elderly lady in a fur coat who was leaning on a crutch. Through the open door was visible the moonlit night outside, and the trees covered with

white. The horses standing by the steps shook and grumbled. The noises of departing sleds died out, the hard snow crunching under the runners far on up the road. . . . Only a woman remained in the waiting room; she wore a new reddish fur coat and sat on a long wooden bench by the wall near Ignat's trunk. Ignat went over toward the bench, squatted down, pulled the little trunk up onto his back, and, suddenly recalling a distant spring when he was living with Thiona, the half-wit, and was free of worries and free to drink good vodka and finish off with cold boiled potatoes, he strode out of the station.

He walked rapidly, determinedly, his boots squeaking in the snow. The fields were dead and empty. The moon was hiding behind the light clouds, the road stretching in the dark in front of him. . . . In Izvaly, he came back from his slow, dulled thoughts. Around him he saw the widely spaced-out houses of the village, all asleep. There was not one late light in the huts buried in the shadows and the snow. The air seemed quieter, the freshness sweeter. A restive rooster crowed somewhere in the yards.

He stood in front of his own empty hovel on the outskirts of the village near the gulley, not knowing what to do. A small hut it was, half-buried by the drifts. There was a lock on the door and one window boarded up. The snow at the open gates of the yard showed tracks of peasant shoes. A snow bank at the side of the house rose level with the roof. Ignat followed the path inside and sauntered around the yard. In an open shed in the back someone's calf was sleepily trying to make itself comfortable for the night. . . .

A little way on, in Marey's hut, a dim light was

burning. The glimmer came through a tiny window almost level with the high snow of the road. He went across and peered in at the pane. A spinning wheel occupied almost all the tiny hut. A youngish woman with a firm, ruddy face, was spinning linen thread and making the room grumble with the noise of the wheel. Ignat knocked. She looked up with fear and surprise. He walked inside and set the trunk down. The girl, a mute from childhood, went over to the stove and began tugging at a shoestring dangling from a rough peasant shoe which hung from the bed above. Heavy with the first hours of sleep, the man above responded only with a husky coughing and grumbling as she pulled at the shoe. Finally, the old fellow, her father, began crawling down backwards, groping with the heavy wrapped shoe for his footing. Once down, he hobbled along the wall, leaning against it, trying to avoid stepping on one foot, which was apparently injured. He reached the bench near the table. Bearded, dishevelled, with bulging, blood-shot eyes, he looked half mad. Ignat pushed the trunk against the wall, and sat down at the table. The young woman, her hands clasped before her, stood staring by the stove.

Marey, having first asked a smoke, inhaled deeply, and let the smoke out slowly, gratefully, until his head and beard were lost in a cloud.

"Your missus?" he repeated. "Sure I've seen her. I see her walking from the church. . . . Didn't take much to living by herself there. Rather stay at the big house. The masters' place. Nobody much there though, either. They're both gone a long time now . . . to Moscow. They say she's gone and fired the overseer. Runs the whole show herself now. The big boss. Nothing small about her—your missus. She aims to please herself. . . . That's

what. . . ."

"Yes, I know. I know," said Ignat. Preoccupied, he slid his fingernail back and forth along a dirt-filled crack in the table.

"Sure you know. . . . Well, you scare the hell out of her. She'll stop. Scare her. I got mine there engaged." He looked towards the dumb girl, still standing in the corner. "A person can't ever be sure, at that. He's a widower. And suppose he slips out of it? The hell! He needs a wife like her. Of course, she don't talk clear, but for work, she's first-class. I won't knock her. . . . Here, you now, you picked out a good one. And now where are you. Bad match, I'd say. Cut a tree your own size, as they say. . . ."

"I'll leave my trunk here with you for a while," said Ignat, without raising his eyes.

"Sure, leave it. Why don't you leave it?" Marey agreed.

He got up to the door to let Ignat out. The night was still frosty and clear. The skies were clearing of clouds, the moon, bright and full, rolled out in space, a slanting white streak of cloud moved rapidly toward the northern horizon. The shadows were deeper, the road sparkled.

"Winter, all right," grumbled Marey, withdrawing his head from the doorway, his nostrils tingling with the icy air.

Again Ignat went determinedly on, without once turning his neck in his rough army muffler to look back. He walked a little more than two versts, passed the other sleeping houses of the villages, and then set out toward the meadow along the hill-road. On the hill, he could see the familiar buildings of the Panin place, the dark clumps of trees in the front yard of the house, and

the four lighted windows. He went toward the lower fields, at the foot of the hill, entered the gates, and crossed along the dam of the pond now covered with snow. Ahead of him were the rambling, gloomy sheds of the barn yard, looming darkly under the tall old trees. The sky seemed endless. The moon rolled to his right. Here and there shone large stars. A rabbit sat upright on its small haunches, ears up, and then hopped off across the field beyond the pond. A light in the hut under the yard trees shone like a red-gold star.

Why wasn't he asleep, this cowherd here? Why did he look at Ignat so keenly? This pale, blue-faced, yellow-headed herd boy who opened the door of the roomy warm hut? Over the table was suspended a lamp. In the near corner stood an oil picture in a frame, St. Nicholas in a strawberry-coloured mantle with a purple beard. A small pig walked across the sticky dirt floor, crunching something in its teeth. Behind the partition near the stove were young calves, brown and yellowish-white. They were still awake, their snouts with wide tender, rosy-moist nostrils leaned upon the top partition board, staring with their bland eyes, urinating in thin straight light streams. They smelled of wet cow fur and warm cow's milk, with a heat almost intestinal. Long after, Ignat remembered this smell, simple and soothing. And there, in the midst of it, the old man, his own father. On the bed near the partition, the old man sat, dangling his pale, hairy legs in their thinnish blue breeches. He was a little bald and thin now, nearly a skeleton. Placing his large hands impressively on his knees, and shutting his blind eyes, he turned his face to the icon, whispering.

"He's a little touched," explained the herd boy, quietly, as he stared at Ignat. "He's got mighty aged here."

Hearing the voice and feeling someone's presence, the old man threw back his head, still more stately in his aged dignity, showing his thin nose, drawn with leanness.

"God bless you, God bless you," he murmured.

Uncovering his cropped head, bundled still by the service muffler, but forgetting to greet his father, Ignat turned to the boy, "Is Lubka in the house?"

"In the house, yes. She's in the house," the boy answered hurriedly. "A city merchant's come to see her."

Ignat replaced his cap, left the hut and went up the hill, through the orchard. He walked rapidly toward the house, sinking in the drifts, and lurched across the greenish shadows of the house garden. And there, through the small window of the side hallway, he saw his wife.

Suddenly, a muffled bark of a dog came from behind the wall of the house. He jumped back and stood dead still, pressed against the wall.

## IV

Lubka set the smoking samovar to boil in the dim corridor. By the light of a candle, burning low in its green-copper stick on the window-sill, she took up a needle and some socks. She seemed stout now, a pretty, black-eyed woman, with full breasts softly rounding in a red blouse, a white kerchief on her head, the wide part in her black hair retreating beneath its folds.

Two large shadows, one rising blurred, the other much more sharply, fell from her onto the wall, stretching from the candle to the ceiling. As Ignat came up to the window, Lubka was gazing thoughtfully at the sock, her head tilted to the side. From the darned heel, she carefully drew out a scrolled silver soup-spoon. A spotted

pointer, dappled with white and brown, stirred on a silk carriage cushion in a corner of the sitting-room, suddenly barked in a rich basso, jumped up, clawed along the parquet floor, and burst into the hallway. Lubka, startled, looked up, lively and concerned. She looked toward the door leading from the hallway into the sitting-room. Then, her hand against her cheek above the candle in the window, she flattened her face against dark pane.

"Who's there?" she demanded, loudly, her voice clear and authoritative. A little anxiously, however, she opened a small pane, then another, and looked out the opened square into the chilled light air.

The night, settling over the dead white world, over the villages now long asleep, over the estate frozen in silence, was crystallized at highest beauty. The spots of candle-light burned greenish on the garden snow. Lubka could not see the moon, but when she lifted her head, she saw its pale reflection on the branches of the pines. Beyond the tree trunks spread the white of the open yard, and the fresh twinned tracks cut into it by the merchant's sled were already frozen hard. She lowered her black brows, a strange anxiety spreading through her, a feeling of the presence of a man in the dark. She waited for an answer. Then she shut the little window and went into the sitting-room to set the table.

In the large, chill drawing-room, the furniture stood helter-skelter, many straight chairs, and many stuffed easy arm chairs. Against the wall near the door to the hall stood a piano. The tall doors opening into the adjoining room were closed. Between the doors and the porcelain stove in the corner hung a blackish, full-length portrait, its paint peeling inside its gold frame. The table

near the windows was lighted by a ceiling lamp suspended on chains.

The merchant had come from the city to see about the cutting of the Miliutin wood, which he had bought for timber. The buyer was spending the night in the manor house. He was a heavy-set man with an iron-gray beard, and small, black, cross-eyes. He opened the upper hooks of his full Romanoff pelt coat, displaying the sheepskin lining curling over his chest. Stepping quietly in his black felt boots, he walked around the room, idly, examining the furniture, the chiffoniers, the bronze horse under its glass bell on the marble mirror mantel. Near the stove a mouse was fussing, straining to pull through a small crack in the floor a large piece of half-chewed candy. The merchant gazed calmly at the mouse's struggles. The pointer, its attention, too, attracted, frisked and barked, and the merchant, with a half-smile of pleased interest, listened to the echo through the big house, an echo ringing on the copper strings of the piano. He strolled over and lifted the piano cover, and experimentally thumbed at the keys. . . .

"Nice here, in your place," he said to Lubka, as she went in and out of the room to the samovar in the corridor. "Quiet."

"Dull," said Lubka, with a small smile.

She set the table, brought out a small jar of green preserves, a salt bowl in which the salt was half bread crumbs, a plate with a slab of pork, rainbow-rusty and stuck in a cottony congealed grease, and a bottle of vodka, the glass bottle rimey from the frost.

"Why don't you find yourself some fun?" asked the buyer, hinting, with habit, at what one usually hints.

"Maybe I should," answered Lubka, vaguely, in her

habitual carefree way.

There was none of the old liveliness in her tone. She had become quieter, she spoke less, plainly and more crudely, inured to squabbles with workers and losing her gloss of gentry manners. Thanks to the gift which is natural with women like her—not to give voice to anything superfluous—Lubka, with all her limitations, nevertheless gave the impression of being pretty wise.

When she brought in the samovar, raising it high in front of her, the buyer squeezed behind the table, edging along the new Viennese divan without once removing his cross-eyes from her breast. She looked sideways at him and, unhurriedly, with an air of apparent indifference, walked away from the table and stood, as if warming herself, against the cold stone of the fireplace. The merchant pushed back the sleeves of his fur coat and took a knife in his left hand, the fork in his right. Lubka noticed that, too. "A lefty," she thought. "I bet he's a fast one." The pointer, on the floor, again barked huskily, peering out into the hall, and Lubka listened anxiously.

"Who is he barking at?" asked the merchant, his nostrils expanding after the drink. "How that racket carries in here!" he added. "A regular organ this, not a house."

"That's that drunkard, I bet, the husband of our herdswoman," said Lubka. She smiled contemptuously. "There is so much fun around here. . . . God help us!"

The buyer cut off a piece of pork and carefully smeared on mustard.

"You don't say."

"So help me God," said Lubka. "She's been running around here with one fellow. But she won't turn down

nobody. Of course, her man is roaring mad. I don't want to say anything, but I tell you there's going to be trouble."

"Well, did she find still another sweetie?"

"Plenty," said Lubka, thinking not of the herdswoman but of herself and of her own lover, the tailor from Shatilovo who was madly jealous of her and continually threatened to kill her.

She glanced occasionally at the window. The frosty glass shone greenish in all its squares. Through the glass, the garden was blurred and faint in the snow. The merchant munched on, reflectively. Lubka yawned weakly and spoke again.

"The frost is going to be awful. Just stick your nose out and you'll freeze to death."

"That's right," said he, and looked at the dog which lay contentedly with its snout on its paws. "Whose dog is that?"

"That's the young one's—Nikolai Kuzmich's," she said. "I'm sick of her. She can't live in the yard, she's too delicate. She's too thin-skinned. Got to give her a bath twice a week; killing myself with the beast. He's a strange fellow."

"A damn fool, too, I might add," said the buyer.

"Fool or not, that's not my woman's business to judge," said Lubka, thinking that such a modest answer would please the city visitor. "But the truth is, he ain't much use, and he doesn't live at home. He writes about that dog in every letter, though. Worries over it."

"You been living here long?"

"Long! The seventh year, I guess."

"I suppose—contented?"

"Well, not bad. I'm the boss here, you know. Nobody

to tell me. They ain't never here, the rest of them."

"Your husband in the army, eh?"

"In the army."

"Never done any fighting, I bet."

Lubka laughed, holding her hands behind her back as if warming them. "They have luck, the devils," she said.

"I bet his time's up soon, though?"

"That's the trouble. Too soon. He wrote and threatened: 'I'm going to drink myself to death!' What's that to *me?* '*You*'ll be the one lying in the gutter,' I told him," said Lubka, repeating the words she often told her tailor. "And he is jealous, too. I'm sick and tired of his love. He used to yell at me, 'I'll kill you,' and what then?—one soft word from me and he crawls all over the place. Well, he might kill. Even so. Sometimes I do get kind of scared, nights especially, when the dogs bark. I get kind of scary."

"You have a right to make a complaint," said the buyer. "The times are over when they could smack you down just like that."

He finished all of the pork, cutting around the fuzzy grease. He finished the rest of the vodka. His eyes became oily and he opened his heavy fur coat. Hiccoughing, he took out of his pocket a red packet of tobacco, a reed mouthpiece, a little book of papers, and carefully blew off a leaf. In his stubby fingers he rolled a thick cigarette.

"When did you get married?" he asked, smiling and puffing with enjoyment.

"Four years ago."

"No children?"

"No."

"How's that? I supposed you were strong, beautiful."

"Terribly beautiful," said Lubka, flattered, but smiling

with contempt. She began to lie. "I don't suppose that's my fault. I want children myself. He must be sick or something. That ain't my fault. That's why he's sore. That's why he's cross. When I was young I was nobody's cold potato. I'd bite him black and blue and he would work hard . . . but no result . . . mean lot, a woman's," she wound up.

The merchant stared at her with narrowed eyes. He inhaled deeply, sending the smoke to the ceiling.

"Ye-es, that's right, all right," he said, not knowing what he was saying. "Say, why do you hide yourself behind the stove all the time?"

With artful simplicity, Lubka said: "Well, where should I be standing? This is my place."

"Sit down here at the table," said the merchant. "You'll get warmer here. Don't play so coy, I don't mind you."

"Well, if you don't mind, I'll sit by," she said, with a playful modesty, and took a chair at the table.

She realized that the merchant was growing uneasy, not knowing how to begin. He reclined on the divan, sighed at times, heaved at others, shut his eyes, and smiled darkly, and stared heavily at her breasts and her hair. His eyes, by turns, were glazed and bright. Pretending to notice nothing, Lubka lowered her eye-lashes, drank weak tea with lemon and modestly wiped her wet dark-downed upper lip with the tip of her headkerchief. The man sighed, still noisier, and, suddenly, without looking at her, hastily began unbuttoning with his thick awkward hands the bosom of his blue flannel shirt, under which it seemed he still wore an undershirt. He unbuttoned the undershirt, too, and groped inside, pulling out, at last, a wallet. Lubka moved a thin slice of lemon

with her fingers, took it from the edge of her saucer, put it into her mouth and began to suck it, wrinkling her face out of all proportion, with the air of sensing only one thing, the sharp sourness of the citron. She noticed instantly that the wallet was very thick and worn, and her quick glance took in the swollen wad of banknotes which the merchant removed from the leather case. Peeling off one old note, repaired with gummed paper, he put back the others, shoving the wallet once more deep into the interior of his clothes.

He cupped his right hand over Lubka's.

"How's that, huh?" he asked.

Lubka calmly looked at the ten-rouble note, then shifted her warm gaze to him.

"You hear me?" he repeated, crudely.

She took up the bill, silently, and shoved it into the pocket of her jupe, and, crossing her arms, leaned upon the table, gazing at the man in continued silence. The merchant, not knowing what to do or say, seized her right hand and tugged playfully at the ends of her fingers. They felt clammy and chapped beneath his own. She pulled her hand free and, also not knowing exactly what were the words for the moment, asked, "Why didn't you finish the pork?" She took up a piece from the plate, and put it into her mouth.

"I like it," she said. "It's good. Especially when you fry it." And added, with a laugh, "Here it is Lent, and here we are gobbling away." After a silence she added, carelessly, "Well, we'll roast in hell, anyway."

"For what?" asked the merchant.

"For everything. Our place is in hell. The old people say that a peasant never makes a saint. It's only the priests and the bishops get the wings."

Suddenly she straightened up from the table and said resolutely:

"What do you say? Let's go."

V

Ignat, standing in the snow, had long since lost the feeling of his legs. His head was like a frozen stone. His coat felt thin and icy. At first he had wiggled his toes in his army boots and jerked his shoulders in the cold. But later he paid no attention at all to the fact that the last vestiges of heat within him were centered, throbbing, in his breast. His lips were wooden, the ends of his muffler, his eye-lashes and moustache, were stiff with frost.

He paid no heed to time. He was lost in the morbid will to see his suspicions confirmed. From somewhere came a cockcrow. The night was passing. The paling moon sank westward. The three belt stars of Orion, like three silver buttons, glittered, paling, toward the horizon. The shadows of the peasants' hovels fell half across the yard. In the frosty quiet even the sound of the chickens stirring in their coops beside the huts seemed small and clear. From the stables came the crunching sound of the merchant's horse, still busy at his oats, and then the heavy movement of the animal's body as it lay down later with a sigh. Facing the sitting-room window, there was a bench at this side of the house half sunk in the snow beneath a garden fir tree. The snow creaked and crackled under the most careful step. Holding his breath, Ignat dragged himself to the bench and stood upon it. And pushing his head between the thick branches of the fir, he became oblivious of everything except the inside of the room—this appalling

woman, speaking and smiling, and the man alone with her in the house at this late hour.

But time went on and nothing happened. Lubka was sitting down now at the cluttered table. . . . The man was pulling something from his bosom—but what? Ignat strained his eyes but could not see. The samovar, the dishes, all were in his way. Lubka rose, leaned on the table, edged over to the man, and through the unbuttoned slit of her dress Ignat saw her underskirt. Suddenly a terrible silence filled the world. There was only the mad beating of Ignat's heart. But at the same instant Lubka straightened up, and strode across the room toward the door leading farther inside the house, the man moving after her. And now, with no other thought in his mind, Ignat jumped off the bench and ran lightly under the firs to circle the house and enter it from the rear. The orchard below the house lay buried in snow. Ignat had noticed when he came through the garden that there were piles of cut wood between it and the house. In the woodpiles, he knew, there must be an axe. He ran to the nearest pile and feverishly, scratching his hands against the icy twigs and branches, rummaged for the familiar rusty tool with its worn slivery handle.

The merchant touched at the pocket of his fur coat to make sure his revolver was still there, and stepped into the hall with Lubka, groping behind her in the dark.

"Don't fall," she said. "There's wood there for the stove." And, stepping over the twigs, he smelled the pleasant bitter scent of the fresh-cut branches.

Lubka stopped, explaining: "This is our back way." She felt along the wall and opened the door into a large, unoccupied room, very cold, redolent of hams,

and moonlit through its two small windows with still unfrozen upper panes. The room was half dark, yet the merchant noticed the hams hanging from the ceiling, a tub of smoked pork, a separator, a bicycle with its weakly glistening nickel parts, and pots dimly showing on the floor against the wall. A wooden bed without a mattress, with only one pillow and no pillow case. Backing toward the bed, Lubka again warned the man, in a whisper, confidentially suitable to the moment:

"Careful! Don't fall in the butter!"

She stood backed against the bed, awaiting him, her position frank and passive, to make it easier for the man to throw her. And, at her low husky tone, he instantly lost himself. She was still whispering something with a rich tremor in her voice, but he no longer heard—seizing and pressing her heavy body to him, he pushed her to the bed, nearer and nearer until her calves came close against the frame. The bed pressed hard against her knees, and Lubka, who resisted only weakly, fell back, wordless. She felt the pain from the pressure of his watch and chain and with one hand pushed aside his thick soft beard, with the other tightly gripping his index finger with its heavy gold ring. She felt the sweet torture filling her body, waves of relaxed power, and as if in anger, bit into the hairs of his beard which covered her mouth. With both her hands she embraced and pressed him to her, clutching now the wrinkled bull-like neck, the tousled head. . . .

But, suddenly, this head began to drag slowly from under her arm, down the length of her body. Her body was lighter. But her legs hurt from the strangely shifted burden. She raised up on her arms. The merchant slumped heavily to the floor. He gasped and fell backwards,

making a thud as the back of his head hit the boards. She jumped off the bed and tried to pull him to a sitting posture. But the man gasped as if in dying agony, whistling in his throat, his body with its ballooning stomach, enormous, cumbrous as a corpse. Fear chilled her.

With trembling hands she tore at the collar of his flannel shirt, pulling off the buttons, loosening the belt with its silver buckle. She took the pillow off the bed and threw it on the floor. She ran through the hall, lit a candle, shoved a towel into a pail of water and rushed back, the candle light in the hall falling upon rats scurrying off in all directions. Placing the light on the bed, she covered the forehead and the up-rolled eyes of the man with the towel, staring in horror at the mountainous bulk rising before her, at the open folds of his pelt coat, and at the white towel, now half covering his bluish face, its black beard thrusting upward. Suddenly, like a clap of thunder, she heard the slam of a door. She stood like a stone when the soldier towered in front of her. He seemed immense, to reach to the ceiling. In one hand he held his cap, in the other he clutched an axe. He took one step toward Lubka and shifted the handle in his palm. She caught, controlled the instant, and pinned him to the spot with her voice.

"All right. I did it," she said. Her words piled out. "Finish him off, quick! Now we can be rich. We'll say that his stroke killed him. Quick!"

Ignat looked at her suddenly drawn face, at the wide, fixed, black eyes, the red blouse and the full, fleshy arms—and with a terrific drive smashed the blunt head of the axe into the damp towel.

## VI

When the cocks crowed the third time a lamp was already burning in the peasant quarters and a stove was crackling cheerfully. The cook, yawning lazily, sat on a bench against the stove, warming herself, and, without blinking, gazed into the hot multi-colored flame, and called Fedka. Fedka, the merchant's driver, was still asleep above the stove, in spite of his orders to hitch up early. The lad, still groggy from his slumber, let himself painstakingly down from above the stove, ladled out cold water from the tub, washed, peasant-like, around his mouth and piggish snout, tore briefly at his thick matted hair with the cook's wooden comb, made the sign of the cross toward the icon in the corner, coughed, squeezed himself behind the table, ate a pot of hot potatoes, poured a heap of salt on the bare boards in front of him, and bolted a huge slab of bread, importantly buried himself in all his coats, belted and buckled himself tightly round the middle, lit a pipe, and briskly squeaking over the frosty snow in his boots—stiff as wood and ginger-coloured from wet-stains—swinging a smoky candle-lantern, set forth to hitch the horse.

The roosters in the barn yard left off their early racketing. Night mingled with day. The objects in the yard stood out with growing morning clearness. In the yard and upon the roofs, the snow lay deep and icy blue. The air was sharp as ether. In the thick green foliage of the frozen firs, the rooks were stirring and calling. In the west, the night still lingered, holding its mystery. The low moon hung dead over the sullen horizon, over the blurred slope beyond the snowy valley of the river. Fedka opened the barn doors and set the lantern on a

ramshackle old carriage bemired by the hens and covered with dust. He seized the cold shafts of the merchant's small painted sled near-by and dragged its iron runners along the frozen earth, through the darkness, over the threshold outside to the pale morning light. He then took the horse collar from its wooden pin in the stone wall, pulled the harness out of the sled and strode along in the snow banks by the straw-packed windows of the stall where the merchant's horse was standing. In the dark, the stall seemed warm and earthy, smelling of the horse, its fresh manure and the sweet, left-over hay. The horse, gray with the loosely sifted snow upon its back, turned its head toward the light when it heard the sound of the door and neighed once, lightly. Fedka came up and the animal playfully lowered its head. The driver brought the bit close, and the colt curved its thick neck down, shaking its head suddenly and hitting Fedka in the chest, refusing to take the bit. Finally, with a show of force, Fedka pushed the bit between the animal's yellow teeth, and then turned aside and wiped his hands on the colt's tail, doing, at the instant, two jobs at the same time, wiping his hands and untangling the long twisted hairs of the tail, straightening it out. He then led the horse to the water trough.

Out of the quiet house, suddenly, rushed a dog, the white and brown spotted pointer. Off the front steps it leaped, barked madly and then, like an animal lost, made two huge circles in front of the steps and rushed back into the house, darkly tranquil at this early hour, its windows dead and snow-covered.

Fedka looked after the dog in astonishment, but the horse was tugging toward the water. The animal pressed its nose on the icy film of the trough, broke it, and

a light mist of steam rose above it. The colt gratefully flattened its velvet lips upon the surface and, sniffing, drew in slowly. It stopped, chewed on the icicles a moment, slightly turning its head to Fedka, while the driver stood by good-naturedly, whistled a note or two encouragingly, looking full into its large light eye and watching the clear water drops trickling from its lips.

"That's good," he said. "That's good now. You can't drink enough to last you a lifetime, anyway." He led the horse back to the sled. It had become entirely light now. In the garden, hidden in the leafless hedges, one could hear the chirping of the sparrows. The dull sky over the garden began to turn a reddish orange. The moon, tinged with red, set behind the white roofs of the village. Fedka hitched the horse, straightened the lines and, holding them in his hand, jumped for the seat as the colt, in a playful dash, suddenly jerked ahead, Fedka leaped after the sled, landing in it on the run, and cut the horse's mouth with the tight-reined bit. To warm up the animal, he drove across the rising hill and dashed through the fields to the gaily brightening east.

But the colt, no longer quite so light and frisky, tired soon. Having made about a verst and a half, and his face burning with the sharp head-on wind, Fedka swung around widely and jogged slowly on back to the house. Very sedately he entered the yard, driving up to the main front entrance, and suddenly he opened his eyes wide and pulled on the reins. The woman cook, wailing loudly, was running from the front steps toward the servants' quarters, her face haggard in the early sunlight. On the steps, at the threshold of the house, sat a man in a military coat, rough muffler tied around his chin and throat, his cropped head bared in the cold. Bending

over, he was scraping up the fresh loose snow from the steps, with his right hand, and daubing it at his temples.

*—Translated from the Russian by Morton Kent and Whit Burnett.*

# THE CAUCASUS

Arriving in Moscow, I furtively established myself in an obscure hotel near the Arbat, and lived there feverishly, secluded—between one meeting and the next with her. She only came to me three times during all those days and each time she entered hurriedly with the words: "I've only come for one minute . . ."

She was pale with the beautiful pallor of a woman moved by love; she spoke in spasms, and the way she threw down her parasol, and immediately lifted her veil to embrace me, filled me with pity and rapture.

"It seems to me," she said, "that he suspects something, has even found out something—perhaps he read one of your letters and found a key to my desk . . . I think he is capable of anything with that cruel proud character of his. He once told me frankly, 'I should stop at nothing in defending my honour, the honour of a husband and an officer!' Now he literally follows every step of mine, and if our plan is to succeed I must be terribly careful. He has already agreed to let me go, as I persuaded him that I shall die if I don't see the South and the sea,—but for God's sake be patient!"

Our plan was a bold one; to travel in the same train to the Caucasian coast and live there for some three or four weeks in a completely wild place. I knew that coast; I had spent some time near Sochi—as a lonely young man—and remembered all my life those autumn evenings among the black cypresses near the cold grey

waves. . . . And she turned pale when I said; "But this time I shall be there with you, in the forest of wild plane trees, in the hilly jungle by the tropical sea . . ." Till the last day we did not believe that our plan would be realized—it seemed to us too great a happiness. . . .

* * *

Cold rain was falling in Moscow, as if summer were already over and would not return, everything was dirty, the sky was overcast, the crows were cawing, the streets glistened wet and black with the open umbrellas of passers-by, and with the raised hoods of carriages which shook as they moved along. And it was a dark repulsive evening when I went to the station; I felt paralysed inside by cold excitement. I rushed through the station halls and on to the platform, pushing my hat down over my eyes and burying my head in my coat-collar. The rain was pattering on the roof of the little first-class coupé which I had reserved in advance. I quickly drew the window-blind, and as soon as the porter, wiping his wet hand on his white apron, had taken his tip and gone out, I bolted the door. Then I very slightly raised the blind, and my heart stood still as I watched the motley crowd moving up and down the platform in the dim light of the station lamps. We had arranged that I would reach the station early, and she as late as possible, to avoid the chance possibility that I might run into her and her husband on the platform. It was already high time for them to be there. I watched with strained attention—there was still no sign of them. The second bell rang—I turned cold with fear; she was late, or perhaps at the last moment he had refused to let her go! But

all of a sudden I saw his tall figure, with its peaked officer's cap, its narrow overcoat and suède-gloved hands; he held her under the arm as he strode along. I started back from the window, and sank into a corner. The next carriage was a second-class one—I pictured mentally how he entered it with her, looked round like a master—had the porter arranged her things properly?—removed his gloves and cap, made over her the sign of the cross, kissed her . . . the third bell rang in my ears, the jerking train numbed my senses. It started to move, shaking and swaying, then by degrees more smoothly, at full steam. . . . With an icy hand I gave a ten-rouble note to the conductor who escorted her to me and brought over her luggage. . . .

Coming in, she did not even kiss me, only smiled pathetically as she sat down and started to disengage her little hat from her hair.

"I could eat nothing at dinner," she said. "I thought I should never endure playing this ghastly part to the end. And I'm terribly thirsty. Give me some mineral water," she said, calling me for the first time by my name. "I'm convinced he will follow straight after me. I gave him two addresses, Gelendjik and Gagry. Well, in three or four days he will be in Gelendjik . . . God help him—better death than these tortures. . . ."

In the morning when I went into the corridor, the sun was shining in, the air was stuffy with a scent of soap and eau-de-Cologne from the lavatories and with the typical smell of a crowded train in the early morning. The level expanse of burnt steppe showed through the windows dim with dust; one could see the broad dusty roads, the wooden carts drawn by bullocks, the station-huts flashed by with canary-coloured patches of

sunflowers and crimson hollyhocks in their little gardens . . . further away passed the endless bare plains with their burial mounds and tombs, the unbearably dry sun, the sky like a dusty cloud, then ghostly glimpses of the first mountains on the horizon . . .

From Gelendjik she sent him a postcard, and wrote on it that she still did not know where she was going to stay.

Then we travelled along the shore towards the south.

We found a primitive spot, near a forest of plane trees, overgrown with flowering shrubs, red wood, magnolias, and pomegranate bushes, in the midst of which fan-shaped palms and dusky cypresses rose up . . .

I woke early, and while she was still asleep, before we drank tea together at seven o'clock, I walked through the wooded hills. The sun was already warm, refreshing and joyful; under the sky-blue openings in the woods a fragrant luminous mist dispersed and melted; far beyond the farthest tree-tops glistened the eternal whiteness of snow-capped mountains. . . . On my way back I passed through the sultry village bazaar which smelt pungently of burning dung, seethed with business and was thick with human beings, horses and donkeys; in the mornings people from various mountain tribes came down to the bazaar; Circassian women in long black robes, swayed gracefully as they walked in high red boots, their heads muffled in some black material; their rapid bird-like glances darted out occasionally from those funereal wrappings.

Later we went to the sea shore, always deserted, bathed and lay in the sun till lunch-time. After lunch—grilled fish, white wine, nuts and fruit—in the hot twilight of our little tile-roofed hut, warm lively strips

of sunlight played through the slanting blinds.

When the heat abated and we opened the window, that part of the sea visible from it between the cypresses, sloping down from under us, looked violet-coloured and lay motionless, so smooth and peaceful that it seemed there could be no end to all this calm and beauty.

Towards sunset astonishing clouds piled up over the sea; they glowed in such magnificence that sometimes she lay down on the sofa, covering her face with a gauze scarf, and wept; another fortnight, three weeks—and then Moscow again!

The nights were hot and impenetrably dark, in their blackness fireflies moved and shimmered with a topaz-coloured light, and the croaking of the forest frogs sounded like wooden bells. When the eye grew accustomed to the dark, the stars came out and the mountain ridge above the village jutted out among trees, which we had not noticed by day. And all night long we could hear the hollow sound of drums and the throaty, nostalgic hopelessly-happy wail of what seemed to be one and the same unending song.

Not far from us, along a ravine falling from the forest to the sea, a small transparent stream rushed along its stony bed. How wonderfully its spray glistened at that mysterious hour when the late moon, like some heavenly being, gazed fixedly over the mountains and woods!

Sometimes at night threatening clouds rolled across from the mountains, a furious wind started to blow, at intervals fantastic green abysses opened in the rustling sepulchral blackness of the forest, and elemental claps of thunder cleft the sky. Then among the trees the

young eagles woke up and whined, the snow leopard howled, and the jackals started to help. . . . Once a whole pack of them came running up to our lighted window—they always run towards houses on such nights—we opened the window and looked down on them, while they stood under the shining torrents of rain and yelped—asking to be let in to us. . . . She wept with joy as she looked at them.

He searched for her in Gelendjik, in Gagry and in Sochi. On the second day after his arrival in Sochi, he took a morning bathe in the sea, then shaved, put on clean linen, a snow-white military jacket, had lunch in his hotel on the terrace of the restaurant, drank a bottle of champagne, and coffee with chartreuse, then slowly smoked a cigar. Returning to his room, he lay down on the sofa and shot himself through the temples with two revolvers.

# TANYA

She was working as a housemaid in the house of his relation Madame Kazakov, who owned a small estate. She was just seventeen years old; her tiny figure was especially noticeable when she walked barefoot, her skirt swaying gently from side to side and her little breasts moving under her blouse, or when she stood in winter in her felt boots; her simple little face could only be called pleasing, and her grey peasant eyes had no beauty other than that of youth. In those far-off days he used to embark on every kind of senseless adventure, he led a roving life, had many chance love affairs—and his relationship with her started as a casual affair of this kind. . . .

* * *

She soon reconciled herself to that surprising stroke of fate which befell her one autumn evening; for a few days she wept, then every day she became more and more convinced that what had happened was no misfortune, but a happiness, that he was becoming every day dearer to her; in moments of intimacy, which soon began to recur quite often, she already called him Petrusha and spoke of that night as if it were something sacred belonging to their past.

At first he both believed and doubted:

"Is it really true you weren't just pretending to

sleep that night?"

She only opened her eyes more widely:

"But didn't you realize that I was sleeping, don't you know how soundly children and young girls sleep?"

"If I had known you really were asleep, I should never have touched you."

"Well, and I simply didn't feel anything almost up to the last moment! But how did it enter your head to come to me? When you arrived you hardly looked at me, only in the evening you asked, so she's new here, is she called Tanya? and then you looked away without paying any more attention to me. So you were only pretending?"

He answered that of course he was pretending, but he did not speak the truth; for him also it had all happened quite unexpectedly. He had spent the early autumn in the Crimea and on his way back to Moscow had stopped to visit Kazakova, spending a fortnight in the soothing simplicity of her country life; when the dim November days began he got ready to leave. Taking leave of the countryside on that day, he rode about from morning till night with a gun over his shoulder and accompanied by a sporting dog, guiding his horse over empty fields and through bare woods; he found no game and returned to the house tired and hungry, ate for supper a panful of beef cutlets with sour cream, emptied a small decanter of vodka and some glasses of tea, while Kazakova, as always, went on talking about her late husband and her two sons who were in government service at Orel. By ten o'clock it was quite dark in the house; only a candle was burning in the study next to the drawing-room, where he was put up when he stayed in the house. When he entered the study,

she was kneeling on his bed, a converted sofa, waving a flaring candle close to the plank wall. Seeing him, she dropped the candle on the night table, and jumping down, ran from the room.

"What is it?" he asked in amazement. "Wait a moment, what on earth were you doing?"

"I was burning a bug," she answered in a hurried whisper. "I was arranging your bed, when I looked up and saw a bug on the wall. . . ."

And she ran off laughing.

He watched her go, and without undressing, only removing his long boots, he lay down on the quilted cover on the sofa, intending to smoke and turn things over in his mind—he was unaccustomed to going to bed at ten o'clock—but he fell asleep at once. He woke up for a moment, disturbed in a dream by the guttering candle-flame, blew it out and fell asleep again. The next time he opened his eyes, the brilliant light of the autumn moon was pouring in through the two windows facing the courtyard and from the wide window on to the garden; the night had an empty and lonely beauty. He found his slippers near the sofa and went out into the passage leading to the back door—they had forgotten to leave for him what was necessary at night. But the next door seemed to be bolted from the other side, so he went round to the front hall through the mysteriously illuminated house. From there the main passage led into a large wooden ante-room. In the passage opposite a tall window over an old locker, stood a partition, behind which was a room without windows, where the maids always slept. The door through the partition was open, but it was dark inside. He lit a match and caught sight of her asleep. She was lying on her back on a

wooden bed, in a blouse and cotton skirt—her little breasts showed their roundness through the blouse, her legs were bare to the knees, her right arm, pressed against the wall, and her face on the pillow looked still as death. . . . The match went out. He stood there—and gently approached the bed. . . .

* * *

Going back through the dark ante-room into the hall he thought feverishly:

"How strange, how unexpected! Could she really have been asleep?"

He stood in the porch and went outside. . . . It was an extraordinary night. The broad open courtyard was brilliantly lit by the high moon. Opposite some sheds with old, almost fossilized thatched roofs, stood a cattle-shed, the coach-house and the stables. And everything around had its own uncanny night existence, detached from human beings, shining without any purpose; it was still more uncanny to him because it seemed to be the first time he saw this world of an autumn night. . . .

He sat down near the coach-house on the footboard of a carriage streaked with dry mud. The warm air smelt like an autumn garden, the night was majestic, serene, benevolent, and somehow harmonized surprisingly with those feelings which he had borne away from that unexpected union with a half-childish girl. . . .

She wept softly when she came to herself as though she only realized that moment what had happened. Perhaps she was really unaware before. Her whole body had yielded to him without any life of its own.

First he had urged her in a whisper, "Don't be frightened, listen. . . ."

She heard nothing or pretended not to hear. He quietly kissed her warm cheek—she did not respond to the kiss, and he thought that she silently consented to whatever might ensue. He moved her legs apart in their tender warmth—she only sighed in her sleep, slightly stretched herself and put one hand behind her head. . . .

"But if it was not pretence?" he thought, getting up from the footboard and looking excitedly around him.

When she wept, sweetly and pathetically, he felt not only animal gratitude for that unexpected happiness which she had unconsciously given him, but a kind of enthusiasm and love, and he began to kiss her neck, her breast, inhaling that intoxicating scent of something rural and virginal. And she, through her tears, suddenly gave a spontaneous feminine response—strongly, and it seemed gratefully, embracing him and pressing his head to her breast. In her half-wakeful state she did not know who he was—but no matter—he was the man with whom at some time she was bound to be linked in the most mysterious and sacred intimacy. That mutual link had been forged, nothing in the world could break it, he carried it within him for ever, and now this extraordinary night received him into its inscrutable moonlit kingdom together with that bond. . . .

How could he, when he left, remember her only casually, how could he forget her sweet frank little voice, her sometimes gay sometimes melancholly but always loving and devoted eyes, how could he love others, some of whom would mean much more to him than she did!

* * *

The following day she served at table without raising her eyes. Kazakova asked:

"What is the matter with you, Tanya?"

She answered respectfully:

"I have some trouble, Madam . . ."

Kazalova said to him when she went out:

"Well, of course, she's an orphan, without a mother, her father is a wandering beggar. . . ."

Towards evening when she was placing the samovar in the hall, he passed by and said to her:

"You won't believe it, but I've loved you for a long time. Stop weeping and tormenting yourself, you won't gain anything by that. . . ."

She answered, dropping red-hot charcoal into the samovar:

"If you really loved me, how much easier it would all be. . . ."

Then she used sometimes to glance up at him as if she were timidly enquiring: is it true?

One evening when she had gone to prepare his bed, he came up behind her and embraced her round the shoulder. She cast a frightened glance at him, and whispered, blushing all over:

"Go away, for God's sake. The old woman will come in at any moment. . . ."

"What old woman?"

"The old housemaid, you know her!"

"I'll come to you tonight. . . ."

She felt hot all over—the old woman terrified her at first.

"Oh, what are you saying, I shall go mad with fright!"

"Well, there's no need, don't be afraid, I won't come," he said hurriedly.

She was again working as before, quickly and efficiently, constantly darted backwards and forwards across the courtyard into the kitchen, as she used to, and sometimes, seizing a favourable moment, secretly cast at him looks of embarrassed joy. And one day at dawn, while he was still asleep, they sent her into the town to do some shopping. At lunch Kazakova said to him:

"What shall I do? I sent the agent with a workman to the windmill, I've no one to send to the station to meet Tanya. Perhaps you wouldn't mind going?"

Restraining his joy, he answered with pretended indifference:

"Of course, I'll gladly go."

The old housemaid, who was waiting at table, frowned:

"Why, Madam, do you want to bring the girl to lasting shame? What will they say about her in the village after that?"

"Well, go there yourself," said Kazakova. "Do you expect the girl to walk from the station?"

About four o'clock he went off in a gig drawn by a tall old black mare, pressing her on to avoid being late for the train, sliding over the greasy road which had frozen and thawed again—the last few days had been damp and misty, and that day the fog was particularly dense; when he was driving through the village it seemed that night had fallen and hazy red lights showed in the huts, like wild patches in the enveloping mist. Further on, in the fields, it grew quite dark and one could no longer see through the fog at all. A cold wind blew in his face, but it did not disperse the fog—on the contrary, it compressed still more densely those cold dark-grey

clouds, filling them with damp fumes, and it looked as if nothing lay beyond that impenetrable mist—only the end of the world and of everything alive. His cap, his coat, eyelashes and moustache were all covered with tiny beads of moisture. The black mare lurched along and the carriage, jolting over the slippery ruts, shook his bones. He leaned over and started to smoke—the sweet aromatic warm human smoke of the cigarette mingled with the primeval smell of fog, late autumn and damp bare fields. And everything around grew darker and gloomier—he could hardly see the dim outline of the horse's long neck and pricked-up ears. And he felt increasingly near to the horse—to the only live being in that wilderness, in that deadly enmity of everything around to right and left, behind and in front, of all that lay unknown, ominously hidden in the ever thicker and blacker waves of that smoky darkness which was engulfing him. . . .

When he reached the village near the station, he rejoiced at the signs of human habitation, the pathetic little lights in the squalid windows, their affectionate cosiness—and the station itself seemed to him like another world, lively, cheerful and urban. And he had hardly managed to tie up the horse before the train came thundering into the station; its windows were all lit up and it exuded an acrid smell of burning coal. He ran on to the platform feeling as if he expected to meet his newly-married wife, and immediately caught sight of her dragging two large shopping bags out of a compartment facing the station-master's office. The station was dirty and reeked from the oil of the kerosene lamps which lit it dimly; she was dressed up in her town clothes, her eyes were bright with youthful excitement

about the unaccustomed journey, and the station-master made some polite remark to her. Suddenly her eyes met his and she stopped in confusion. What could it mean, why was he here?

"Tanya," he said hurriedly. "Good day, I've come to fetch you. There was no one else to send. . . ."

Had she ever known in her life such a happy evening? . . . He came to meet me himself, and I was all dressed up and much prettier than he had ever imagined, having only seen me in the same old skirt, in a plain cotton blouse—but I looked as if I had just come out of a dress-maker's shop in that white silk scarf and new brown woollen dress under a little cloth jacket, white cotton stockings and new half-boots with brass buckles. . . . With inward trembling she spoke to him in the tone of a newly-arrived visitor, and lifting up the hem of her skirt, she followed him with dainty lady-like steps, as if on the point of exclaiming indulgently: "Oh, my God, how slippery, how the peasants have trampled the mud!" Her heart sinking with delighted fear, she raised her dress high over her white calico petticoat, in order to sit on the petticoat and not on the dress, got into the carriage and sat down beside him as if she were his equal, awkwardly arranging the bags at her feet.

He silently flicked at the horse and they started off into the icy darkness and fog, passing the low fleeting lights of the huts, jolting over the holes in that deplorable country road, and she, terrified of his silence, did not dare to utter a word; had something made him angry with her? He understood what she felt and deliberately remained silent. And suddenly, leaving the village behind and plunging into complete darkness, he brought the horse to a walking

pace, gathered the reins together in his left hand and with his right pressed her shoulder in its little jacket covered with beads of moisture, laughing and muttering:

"Tanya, Tanechka. . . ."

And she pressed herself to him, her silk scarf and tender flushed face touching his cheek, her eyelashes glistening with hot tears. He found her lips, also wet with joyful tears, stopped the horse, and kissed her for a long time. Then like a blind man, without seeing a thing in the dark fog, he got out of the carriage, and threw his coat on the ground, drawing her towards him by the sleeves. Understanding at once, she immediately jumped down to join him, and with quick deft hands lifting up all her precious clothes, her new dress and petticoat, she lay down quivering on the coat, and surrendered to him for ever not only her body, which was now entirely his, but also her whole soul.

* * *

He again postponed his journey. She knew it was on account of her, she saw how affectionate he was, talking to her like an intimate secret friend in the house; and she was no longer frightened and trembling when he approached her, as she had been at first. He grew calmer and simpler when they met—she quickly adapted herself to him. She had completely changed, with that rapidity of which only youth is capable, became carefree and calmly happy, gaily called him Petrusha, sometimes even pretended that he kissed her more than she wanted: "My God, there's no getting away from you! The moment you see me alone, along you come!"—and that gave her a special kind of pleasure; it means he

must love me, he is entirely mine, if I can talk to him like that! Yet another joy for her was to express to him her jealousy, her right to possess him:

"Thank God there is no work on the threshing-floor, because if any girls were there, I should have shown you the way to run after them!" she said.

And she added, feeling suddenly shy, with a touching attempt to smile:

"Is it too little for you to have only me?"

Winter set in early. The fogs were followed by an icy north wind; hardening the uneven muddy roads, turning the earth to stone and withering the last grass in the garden and courtyard. Leaden clouds covered the sky, the bare garden rustled disconsolately, abruptly, as if it were slinking away, at night the white half-moon dived in and out of banks of cloud. The park and the village began to look terribly poor, petty and vulgar. Next came a fall of snow, whitening the frozen mud like powdered sugar, and the park and fields beyond it grew greyish-white and spacious. They were finishing the last work in the village storing potatoes in the cellar for the winter, sorting them out and throwing away the rotten ones. He walked about the countryside wearing his short fox-fur coat and a fur cap pushed over his forehead. The north wind whistled through his moustache and made his cheeks tingle. Under a gloomy overcast sky the greyish-white sloping fields across the river seemed very near. In the village near the thresholds huge sacks with piles of potatoes lay on the ground. Sitting on these sacks, women and girls were working, huddled in hempen shawls with ragged jackets and worn-out boots, their faces and hands blue with cold—he thought with horror: but under their skirts they have

nothing on, just bare legs!

When he came home, she was standing in the hall, wiping the boiling samovar with a cloth before she carried it to the table, and immediately she exclaimed in a whisper:

"So you've been walking through the village, girls are sorting out potatoes there. . . . Very well, you'd better go on walking till you can find someone better!"

And, restraining her tears, she ran away into the pantry.

Towards evening the snow piled up more and more thickly, and passing him in the drawing-room she glanced at him with an outburst of childish gaiety, and whispered teasingly:

"Well, are you still walking a lot? Not only that—dogs are running about all over the yard—such a din that you can't poke your nose out of the house!"

"My God," he thought, "how shall I ever pluck up courage to tell her that I'm going away so soon."

And he felt an absolute longing to be back in Moscow as quickly as possible. Frost, whirling snow on the square by the Iverskaya, a pair of swift horses with tinkling sleigh-bells, on the boulevard the high electric light from the lamps seen through the snow blizzard. . . . In the Bolshoi Theatre the chandeliers glitter to the strains of violin music, and he, throwing his snowy fur coat into the arms of an attendant, wiping the wet snow from his moustache, walks buoyantly as usual over the red carpet into the warm crowded stalls, through the hum of conversation, the smell of food and cigarettes. among the fussy attendants, while the all-embracing waves of music from the orchestra rise up caressingly languid, stormy or rollicking. . . .

During the whole of supper he could not raise his eyes to her carefree serene face, as she ran backwards and forwards.

Late in the evening he put on his long boots and an old raccoon coat which had belonged to the late Kazakov, pushed his cap forward and went through the back door into the blizzard, sniffing the air. But a whole snowdrift had already formed under the roof of the porch, he slipped into it and his sleeves got covered with snow, and further on was a sheer white hell of deep drifts; constantly sinking in, he got round the house with difficulty, reached the front porch, and stamping his feet and shaking himself entered the dark ante-room, then passed into the warm passage where a candle was burning on the locker. She jumped out bare-footed from behind the partition, dressed in the same cotton skirt, throwing up her arms:

"My God, where have you sprung from!"

He threw his coat and cap on the locker, sprinkling it with snow, and in a mad transport of tenderness picked her up in his arms. She tore herself away excitedly, seized a brush and began to wipe the snow from his boots and to pull them off:

"My God, they're full of snow too! You'll catch your death of cold!"

* * *

Through his sleep that night he occasionally heard how the wind howled monotonously round the house, then rose to a climax, beating snow against the window-panes, shaking them—and died down again, passing further away, moaning drowsily. . . . The night seemed

endless and sweet—in the warmth of the bed, of the old house, alone in the white depths of the mounting sea of snow. . . .

In the morning it seemed that the wind was bursting open the shutters—he opened his eyes—no, it was already light, and with a dazzling whiteness from the snow piled up over the window-sills, and casting white reflections on the ceiling. A wind still blew, but it was quieter, more like day-time. From the corner of the sofa one could see two windows opposite, their double frames blackened with age; the third window, on the left, was the whitest and brightest of the lot. The white reflection lay on the ceiling, but in the corner the door of the stove quivered and hummed while the draught fanned the flames inside—how pleasant it was—he had been asleep and heard nothing, but Tanya, the faithful loving Tanechka, had opened the shutters, entered quietly in her felt boots, chilly from snow, a hempen shawl wrapped round her snow-covered head—had knelt down and lit the stove. And he had hardly gathered his wits together when she came in again, carrying a tray with tea, this time without a shawl. Putting down the tray on the small table near the pillow, with a scarcely perceptible smile she looked into his clear eyes still dazed by sleep:

"How did you manage to sleep so late?"

"But what time is it?" She looked at the clock on the table and did not answer at once—she still found it difficult to read the time:

"Ten . . . ten minutes to nine. . . ."

With a glance at the door he pulled her towards him by the skirt. She turned away, removing his hand.

"You really can't, everyone is awake. . . ."

"Just for one minute!"

"The old woman may come in. . . ."

"No one will come in—just for a minute!"

"Oh, I'm punished with you!"

Quickly drawing her feet in woollen stockings out of their boots, she lay down, looking round at the door. . . . Oh, that peasant smell of her head, her breath, the apple coolness of her cheek! He whispered angrily:

"Again you kiss with compressed lips! When shall I be able to teach you?"

"I'm not a lady. . . . Wait a moment, I'll lie lower down. . . . Be quick, I'm frightened to death."

And they stared into each other's eyes—fixedly, blankly, expectantly.

"Petrusha . . ."

"Be silent. Why do you always speak at such a moment!"

"But when can I speak to you except at such moments! I won't compress my lips any more . . . do you swear to me that you have no one in Moscow. . . ."

"Don't squeeze my neck so hard. . . ."

"No one else will ever love you as I do. And since you've fallen in love with me, I feel somehow as if I love myself—rejoice in myself. . . . But if you throw me over. . ."

Running out with a flushed face through the porch at the back door, she sat down for a moment, then dashed through the white drifts leading to the front porch, sinking in above her knees.

The samovar was burning in the hall. The old house-maid, sitting on the locker under a high window, was sipping tea from a saucer, and without putting it down she squinted at Tanya:

"Where have you come from? All plunged in snow."

"I was giving tea to Pyotr Nikolaich."

"And what did you give him in the servants' room? We know what your tea is!"

"Whatever you know, may it do you good. Has the mistress got up yet?"

"I should think so! Earlier than you."

"Well, you're always angry."

And, sighing happily, she went out to fetch her cup, singing in an undertone:

> "So I go into the garden,
> The green garden,
> To walk through the green garden,
> And meet my dear one there. . . ."

During the day, sitting in the study over a book, listening to the same gale blowing round the house, sometimes calming down, sometimes rising to a fury, drowning everything more and more under masses of milk-white snow—he thought: as soon as the storm is over, I must leave.

In the evening he found an opportunity to tell her to come to him late that night when everyone was fast asleep—to stay the whole night till morning. She shook her head, reflected for a moment and said: "Very well." It was terrifying, but all the more wonderful.

He felt in much the same way but he was also torn by pity for her—she had no idea it would be their last night! At night he kept on falling asleep and waking up from excitement; would she really come? It was pitch dark, the wind shook the shutters and sometimes howled through the chimney. . . . Suddenly he woke up in a

fright, he heard nothing—it was impossible to hear her in that criminal caution with which she groped her way through the darkness of the house—he heard nothing, yet he felt that she was already standing there, invisible, near the sofa. He stretched out his hand. She silently dived under the blanket to join him. He heard how fast her heart was beating, felt her chilled bare feet and whispered the very warmest words he could find and express.

Thus they lay for a long time, breast clasped to breast, and kissing so strongly that their teeth were sore. She remembered he had told her not to close her lips, and in her efforts to please him she opened her mouth like a jackdaw.

"Didn't you sleep at all?"

She answered in a happy whisper:

"Not for a second. I was waiting all the time. . . ."

He fumbled for the matches on the table and lit the candle. She uttered a frightened sound:

"Petrusha, what are you doing? If the old woman wakes up and sees the light . . ."

"Let her go to the devil," he said, looking at her little flushed face. "I want to see you. . . ."

Embracing her, he did not take his eyes from her. She whispered:

"I'm afraid—why do you look at me so?"

"Because there's nothing better than you in the world. That little head with the little pigtail round it, like the young Venus. . . ."

Her eyes sparkled with laughter and happiness:

"What is that Venus?"

"It's you . . . and that little blouse . . ."

"But you'll buy me some fine muslin. . . . It's true

you really love me very much!"

"No, I don't love you at all! And again you smell rather like a quail or dried hemp. . . ."

"Why do you like that? You were telling me I always spoke at these moments . . . but now you speak yourself. . . ."

She began to press him to her still more strongly, wanted to say something more, but could not. . . .

He put out the candle later and lay for a long time in silence, smoking and thinking: but all the same I ought to tell her; it's awful, but I must! And he began in a scarcely audible whisper:

"Tanechka . . ."

"What is it?" she asked in an equally mysterious whisper.

"You know I shall have to go away."

She raised herself:

"When?"

"Well, soon . . . very soon . . . I have business which can't be put off. . . ."

She fell back on the pillow.

"My God!"

That business of his somewhere over there in a place called Moscow filled her with a kind of awe. But all the same how could she be separated from him on account of that business? She said nothing, quickly but helplessly searching in her mind for a way out from this insoluble horror. There was no way out. She wanted to exclaim: "Take me with you!" But she did not dare—could it be possible?

"I can't live here forever. . . ."

She listened and agreed:

"Yes, yes. . . ."

"I can't take you away with me. . . ."

She burst out in despair:

"Why?"

He thought quickly: "Yes, why? why not?"—and hurriedly answered: "I have no home, Tanya, all the time I travel from one place to another. . . . In Moscow I live in an hotel. . . . And never in my life will I marry anyone. . . ."

"Why?"

"Because I was born like that."

"So you will never marry anyone?"

"No one, never! I give you my word of honour—I really have important business which I can't put off. At Christmas I'll come back here again!"

Her head fell on his shoulder, she lay there shedding hot tears, and whispered:

"Well, I must go . . . it will soon be light."

She got up and stood in the darkness, crossing him:

"May the Heavenly Empress preserve you, may the Mother of God preserve you!"

She hurried back to her partition, sat down on the bed, pressing her hands to her breasts, and licking the tears from her lips, she began to whisper through the noise of the storm:

"Father God, Heavenly Empress! God grant that the storm will rage for two days longer!"

* * *

Two days later he went away—the whirlwind outside was only starting to calm down, but he could not prolong any more the hidden torment they both felt, and he resisted Kazakova's entreaties that he should stay

at least till the next day.

The house and the whole place grew empty and dead. It was quite impossible to imagine Moscow and how he lived there, what he was doing.

* * *

He did not come at Christmas—what days those were! What a torture of unresolved expectancy, what pathetic efforts to deceive herself when there was obviously no sense in expecting him any longer—so the time passed from morning till evening! During the whole Christmas festival she walked about in her best clothes—the same dress and half-boots which she was wearing when he met her that autumn on the station platform, on that unforgettable evening.

When Epiphany came, for some reason she greedily seized on the belief that at any moment peasant sleighs would appear over the hill, that he had hired them at the station, having arrived without warning that he would want horses sent; all day long she lay on the locker in the passage, gazing out into the courtyard with an aching pain in her eyes. The house was empty—Kazakova had gone to visit some neighbours, the old housemaid was eating in the servants' hall, and she went on sitting there after dinner, enjoying an exchange of scandal with the cook. Tanya did not even get up for a meal, she said her stomach ached. . . .

But night was falling. She looked again into the empty courtyard shining with frozen snow, and got up, saying firmly to herself; this is the end of it all, I need no one any more, I don't want to wait for anything!—and she walked deliberately, all dressed up, through the hall,

through the drawing-room, lit through the windows by the yellow winter sunset, and sang in a loud carefree voice—relieved that a lifetime had come to an end:

> "So I go into the garden,
> The green garden,
> To walk through the green garden,
> And meet my dear one there!"

And somehow just as she was singing those last words she came into the study, caught sight of his empty sofa, the empty arm-chair alongside the writing table, where he used to sit with a book in his hands, and she sank into that chair with her head on the table, weeping, and crying at the top of her voice:

"Heavenly Empress, let me die!"

* * *

He came in February—when she had already buried her last hopes of seeing him even once again in life.

And it seemed that everything became as it had been before. He was shocked when he saw her—she had grown so thin and pale, her eyes were so dim and sad. She too was shocked at first; he seemed to her different, older, a strange person, almost unpleasant—his moustache seemed larger, his voice coarser, his laugh and the remarks he made in the hall, while he was taking off his coat, were needlessly loud and artificial; she found it embarrassing to look into his eyes. . . . But they both tried to conceal all this from each other and soon it seemed that everything came back as before.

Then again the terrible time approached—the time for

him to leave. He swore to her on the ikon that he would come at Easter and stay for the whole summer. She believed him, but she thought: And what will happen in summer? Will it be the same as now? That meant little enough to her now—it must either be entirely, genuinely as it was before, not a mere repetition, or it must be a continuous life with him without separations, without renewed torments, without the shame of all those shattered hopes. But she tried to chase this thought from her mind, tried to imagine all that summer happiness, when they would enjoy so much freedom everywhere—night and day, in the garden, the fields, in the barn, and he would be close to her for a long, long time. . . .

* * *

On the eve of his next departure the night was bright and breezy, like a forecast of spring. The garden rustled behind the house, and borne by the wind from the same direction came the intermittent, angry but helpless barking of dogs over a pit in the pinewood; inside the pit was a vixen which had been caught in a trap and brought to the house by Kazakova's gamekeeper.

He was lying back on the sofa with closed eyes. She lay on her side, next to him, with one hand clasped under her thoughtful little head. Both were silent. At last she whispered:

"Petrusha, are you asleep?"

He opened his eyes, looked round in the half-darkness of the room, lit with a golden light from a window on the left side:

"No. What is it?"

"Surely you don't love me any more, you ruined

me for nothing," she said quietly.

"What do you mean, for nothing? Don't talk nonsense."

"You sinned in doing that. Where can I go now?"

"But why should you go anywhere?"

"Once again you go away to your Moscow, and what can I do here alone?"

"But just the same as you did before. And later on—surely I promised you definitely; I'll come here for the whole summer."

"Yes, maybe you will come. . . . Only you used not to say such words to me before: 'But why should you go anywhere?' You truly loved me then, you told me you had never seen anyone sweeter than me. Yes, can I really have been like that?"

"Yes, she is no longer the same," he thought, "she has altered terribly. Even her body has withered, all the small bones stick out. . . ."

"My little hour has passed," she said. "I used to run to you before, scared to death and rejoicing, thank God, the old woman has gone to sleep. But now I'm not even frightened of her. . . ."

He shrugged his shoulders:

"I don't understand you. Give me the cigarettes from the table. . . ."

She handed them to him. He lit one.

"I don't know what's the matter with you. You're simply unwell. . . ."

"Surely that's why I'm no longer dear to you. And what, do you think, has made me ill?"

"You don't understand me. I mean you are spiritually unwell—please think for a moment, what has happened, what has made you imagine that I no longer love you?

And why should you go on repeating that word, before, before. . .?"

She made no answer. The dawn glimmered through the window, the garden rustled, from beyond rose intermittently the angry, desperate plaintive yelping of dogs. . . . She slid quietly from the sofa, and pressing her sleeve to her eyes with her head bowed, she walked softly in her woollen stockings towards the door. He called after her in a low but firm voice:

"Tanya."

She turned round and answered almost inaudibly:

"What do you want?"

"Come here to me."

"What for?"

"I tell you, come here."

She came obediently, bending her head to prevent him from seeing that her face was covered with tears.

"Well, what do you want?"

"Sit down and don't cry. Kiss me—well?"

He sat down, she sat beside him and embraced him, weeping quietly. "My God, what should I do!" he thought in despair. "Again those hot childish tears on the flushed childish face. . . . She doesn't even suspect the whole strength of my feeling for her! But what can I do? Take her away with me? Where? To what kind of life? And what would be the result? To bind oneself, ruin oneself for ever?" And he hurriedly began to whisper to her, feeling how his own tears were tickling his nose and lips:

"Tanechka, my joy, don't cry, listen; I'll come in spring for the whole summer, and then we will really walk together 'in the green garden'—I heard you singing that little song and I'll never forget it—we will drive in

the carriage through the woods—do you remember how we came in the carriage from the station?"

"No one will let me go with you!" she whispered bitterly, letting her head fall on his breast. "And you will never drive with me any more. . . ."

But he already detected in her voice a note of timid joy and hope.

"I will come and be with you, indeed I will, Tanechka! And you must always call me by my nickname. And don't you dare to weep. . . ."

He slipped his hands under her legs in their woollen stockings and lifted her light body on to his lap:

"Now say: 'Petrusha, I love you very much.' "

She numbly repeated, choking from sobs:

"I love you very much. . . ."

That was in February of the terrible year, 1917. He was staying there in the country for the last time in his life.

# ROOSYA

At eleven o'clock at night the fast train from Moscow to Sevastopol stopped at a little station beyond Podolsk, where it was not scheduled to stop, and waited for something on the other line. In the train a gentleman and a lady came up to the lowered window of a first-class carriage. A conductor walked across the railway track with a red lamp swinging from his arm, and the lady asked:

"Tell me, why are we waiting here?"

The conductor answered that the post train was late.

It was dark and gloomy in the station. Twilight had fallen long ago, but beyond the platform in the west the prolonged sunset glow of a Moscow summer still cast a dying light over the blackening wooded plains. A damp marshy smell entered through the open window. In the stillness one could hear from somewhere the monotonous croaking of a corn-crake, a sound evoking, somehow, yet another sensation of dampness.

He stood with his elbow against the window-frame; she leaned on his shoulder.

"I lived once in this neighbourhood during my holidays," he said. "I was doing a tutoring job in one of the villas, five versts away from here. A boring place. Patchy little pinewoods, magpies, mosquitoes and crickets. . . . There was no proper view from anywhere. One could only admire the horizon from the upper floor of the villa. The house was built of course in the

Russian villa style and was sadly neglected—the owners had become impoverished—behind the house something like a garden grew, and beyond that garden stretched a cross between a lake and a swamp, overgrown with rushes and yellow water-lilies, and with the inevitable flat-bottomed boat moored alongside the muddy bank.

"And, of course, a bored young lady on holiday, whom you took boating on that swamp."

"Yes, just as you suppose. Only the young lady was not at all bored. I went boating with her chiefly at night, and the whole affair took a quiet poetic turn. The sky in the west kept all night a greenish transparent tint, and like now, over there on the horizon, it went on glowing and glowing. . . . Only a single oar was available and that was more like a spade—I pulled at it like a savage, plunging it from one side to another. The opposite bank was darkened by low woods, but above it glowed that strange perpetual twilight. And everywhere an inconceivable stillness—broken only by the buzzing of mosquitoes and the whirr of dragon-flies in flight. I never thought that they flew about at night—it seemed they had some reason for flying—that was quite frightening."

At last the thunder of an approaching train made itself heard, it came nearer and rushed by with a windy roar, fused into one luminous yellow strip of lit-up windows. Our train at once started to move. The attendant came into the carriage, switched on the light and set about preparing the bunks for the night.

"Well, and what happened to you and that young lady? Was it a real love-story? Why did you never tell me about her before? What did she look like?"

"Tall and thin. She wore a yellow cotton sarafan and

on her bare legs peasant shoes plaited out of various bright-coloured wools."

"So that was also in Russian style."

"I think it was more in the style of poverty. Having nothing else to wear, she fell back on the sarafan. Besides, she was an artist, she studied painting in the Stroganov Institute. She was herself picturesque, like an ikon-painting. A large dark pigtail hung down her back, her face was swarthy with dark little moles, a straight regular nose, black eyes, black eyebrows. . . . Her hair was dry and thick, slightly curling. All that with the yellow sarafan and broad white muslin sleeves combined to create a most charming effect. Her ankles and feet in their loose shoes were austere, the bones protruding from under her delicate brown skin."

"I know that type. I had a friend like that at school. Probably she was hysterical."

"Maybe. All the more so since facially she was like her mother, some kind of princess with eastern blood, who suffered from a brooding melancholia. She only appeared at meal times. She came in, sat down in silence, and coughed, without raising her eyes, shifting her knife and fork from side to side. If she suddenly said something, it was so unexpected and loud that one jumped."

"And the father?"

"Also silent and dry, a tall man, a retired officer. Only their son was a straightforward attractive boy. I was tutoring him."

The attendant came out of the coupé, said that the beds were ready and wished them a good night.

"What was her name?"

"Roosya."

"What kind of a name is that?"

"Very simple—short for Maroosya."

"Well, so you were very much in love with her?"

"Of course I seemed to be, quite dreadfully."

"And she?"

He paused and answered drily.

"Probably it seemed the same to her. But let us go to bed. I'm terribly tired after today."

"I like that! So my interest was in vain. Come, tell me in two words how your love-story ended."

"In nothing. I went away, and that was the end."

"Why didn't you marry her?"

"Obviously I had a premonition I would meet you."

"No, seriously?"

"Well, because I shot myself and she stabbed herself with a dagger. . . ."

They washed their faces, cleaned their teeth, shut themselves up in the stuffy interior of the coupé, undressed and lay down with relief under the fresh glossy linen sheets, their heads resting on the white pillows which slipped down from the raised tops of the beds.

The blue-mauve aperture over the door looked like an eye into the darkness. She soon went to sleep, he lay awake, smoked and returned in his thoughts to that summer . . .

On her body too there were many little dark moles—it was a delightful peculiarity. Because she walked in soft shoes, without heels, her whole body moved under the yellow sarafan. It was a wide thin sarafan, which gave full freedom to her long virgin body. One day she got her feet wet in the rain, and ran from the garden into the drawing-room; he dashed in to help her pull off her shoes and kissed her wet narrow feet—he had never

known such happiness in his life. The fresh fragrant rain poured down ever faster and heavier, clattering on the balcony beyond the open doors; in the darkened house everyone was sleeping after lunch—and how he was frightened out of his wits when a cock, its black feathers shot with iridescent green and with a huge red comb, suddenly also ran in from the garden, its claws tapping across the floor, just at that intimate moment when they had forgotten all precaution. Seeing how they jumped up from the sofa, the cock hurriedly turned back, lowering his head as if from a sense of delicacy, and ran out again into the rain with his shining tail bedraggled. . . .

At first she kept on looking at him; when he said something to her, she blushed deeply and answered in a soft bantering tone; at table she often teased him, turning to her father with loud remarks: "Don't offer him anything, Father, it's useless. He doesn't like cheese dumplings. He doesn't like cold kvass[1] soup or noodles, he despises sour milk and hates milk cheese."

In the mornings he was busy teaching the boy, and she with household jobs—she had to look after everything in the house. They had lunch at one, and after lunch she went to her room upstairs, or, if the weather was fine, into the garden, where her easel stood under a birch-tree; whisking away the mosquitoes, she painted landscapes there. Then she would come on to the balcony where he sat after lunch reading a book in a sloping wicker armchair; she would stand, clasping her hands behind her back, and looking at him with an uncertain smile.

"May I ask what wisdom you are deigning to study?"

[1] Russian drink made from fermented rye or fruit.

"The history of the French Revolution."

"Oh, my God! I had no idea that we are sheltering a revolutionary in the house."

"But why have you abandoned your painting?"

"Oh, I shall give it up completely. I am convinced now that I have no talent."

"But show me a few of your sketches."

"But do you imagine that you know anything about painting?"

"You are very ambitious."

"That is my fault . . ."

One day she suggested he should take her rowing on the lake, and suddenly said in a decisive tone of voice:

"Our tropical rainy season seems to have come to an end. Let us go out and enjoy ourselves. Of course our boat is a bit rotten and has several holes in the bottom, but Petya and I have stopped up all the holes with water weeds. . . ."

It was a hot steamy day. Along the bank the tall grass, speckled with tiny yellow flowers, breathed out a languid sultry warmth and over it flitted and hovered innumerable greenish white butterflies.

Adapting himself to her constantly bantering tone, he went up to the boat and remarked:

"At last you have deigned to descend to my level!"

"At last you have summoned up courage to answer me!"—she promptly retorted and jumped into the prow of the boat, frightening the frogs who splashed into the water from all sides—but suddenly she screamed shrilly, and pulled her sarafan right up to her knees, stamping her feet:

"A snake! A grass-snake!"

He caught a fleeting glimpse of her darkly shining

naked legs, seized the oar from the prow, beat down the snake wriggling on the bottom of the boat, crushed it and threw it far off into the water.

She was pale with a kind of Indian pallor, the moles on her face had darkened, her black hair and eyes had turned even darker. She heaved a sigh of relief:

"Oh, how nauseating! Obviously the word horror (oojas) comes from grass-snake (ooj). They are all round us here, in the garden and under the house. . . . And Petya, just think of it, picks them up in his hands!"

For the first time she was speaking frankly to him, and for the first time they looked each other straight in the eyes.

"You're a fine fellow—how you knocked that snake out properly!"

She became quite expansive, smiled, ran from the prow into the stern and sat down gaily. In her fright what struck him was her beauty, and he thought tenderly: "Yes, she is still completely a young girl!" But, putting on an indifferent preoccupied look, he got into the boat, and leaning with his oar on the damp bottom he wheeled it round and pulled it through the tangled thicket of water-weeds among the green clumps of rushes and the flowering water lilies, which covered everything in front with their thick luxuriant round foliage. He steered the boat into the open water, and sat down on the centre seat, dipping his oar from side to side like in a canoe.

"Isn't this grand?" she exclaimed.

"Certainly!" he answered, removing his cap, and turned towards her. "Please keep this near you, otherwise I shall knock it into that trough, which, excuse me, is still leaking and full of leeches."

She put the cap on her knees.

"But don't worry, throw it down anywhere."

She pressed the cap to her breast.

"No, I shall keep guard over it!"

Once again his heart throbbed tenderly, but again he turned away and began to paddle with vigorous strokes through the water which glistened among the green and yellow vegetation. Midges began to settle on his face and hands, the warm silver light all round was almost blinding; the steamy air, the shifting rays of sunlight, the curly whiteness of the clouds shining softly in the sky, cast reflections in the water between islands of weed and lilies; everywhere the water was so shallow that one could see the bottom with its carpet of green vegetation, but that in no way interfered with the impression of bottomless depth engulfing the reflections of sky and clouds. Suddenly she screamed again—and the boat turned over on its side; she had thrust her hand over the stern into the water, and seizing the stem of a water-lily, had pulled it so violently towards her that she fell over on one side together with the boat—he just managed to jump forward in time to pull her back by her armpits. She burst out laughing, and falling down with her back along the stern she splashed him straight in the face with her wet hand. Then he caught hold of her again, and without knowing what he was doing, he kissed her laughing lips. She quickly threw her arms round his neck and kissed him clumsily on the cheek. . . .

From that time they started going out in the boat at night. The next day she summoned him into the garden after lunch and asked:

"Do you love me?"

He answered warmly, remembering yesterday's kisses

in the boat:

"From the very first day we met!"

"And I——" she said. "No, at first I hated you–it seemed you never noticed me at all. But, thank God, all that is over. This evening, after they have all gone to bed, go to the same place again and wait for me. Only leave the house as cautiously as you can–Mama watches every step I take, she's madly jealous."

That night she came to the shore carrying a rug over her arm. He met her with embarrassed joy, and only asked:

"Why have you brought a rug?"

"How stupid you are! We shall be cold. Well, climb in quickly and row to the opposite bank. . . ."

They remained silent all the time. When they had reached the wood on the other side she said to him: "Well, here we are. Now come to me. Where is the rug? Ah, it's at my feet. Cover me, I'm shivering, and sit down. Like this. . . . No, wait a moment, yesterday we kissed each other accidentally somehow, now I will kiss you first, only softly, softly. And you embrace me . . . everywhere. . . ."

She was only wearing a nightdress under her sarafan. Tenderly, scarcely touching, she kissed him on the edge of the lips. He, with his mind in a whirl, pushed her against the stern. She embraced him in an ecstasy. . . .

For a time she lay exhausted, then she raised herself, and with a smile of tired happiness and still lingering pain she said:

"Now we are husband and wife. Mama says she will never survive my marriage, but I don't want to think of that now. . . . Do you know, I want to bathe, how I love it at night. . . ."

She drew her clothes off over her head, her whole body glowing in the half-light, and she began to arrange her pigtail round her head, raising her arms, showing her dark armpits and rising breasts, unashamed of her nakedness and the dark patch under her belly. Having fastened her hair she jumped up, kissed him quickly, and plunged into the water with a splash; she threw back her head and kicked up the water noisily.

Afterwards he hurriedly helped her to dress and wrapped her in the rug. Her black eyes and black plaited hair looked fantastic in the dusk. He no longer dared to touch her, he only kissed her hands and could not speak for unbearable happiness. All the time it seemed that someone was there in the dark woods along the shore, where now and then a glow-worm twinkled silently—someone was standing there and listening. From time to time something rustled mysteriously. She raised her head:

"Stop, what was that?"

"Don't be afraid, it's probably a frog climbing up the bank. Or a hedgehog in the wood. . . ."

"But what if it's a goat?"

"What kind of goat?"

"I don't know. But just think; a goat comes out of the wood, stands and watches us. . . . I feel so wonderful, I want to talk the most arrant nonsense!"

Again he pressed her hands to his lips, and kissed her cold breast like something sacred. How she had become for him a completely new being! And the greenish half-light still glowed unchanged over the low dark woods, faintly reflected in the water whitening the flat distance; a pungent smell like celery rose from the plants along the bank; invisible mosquitoes hummed

strangely, querulously—and the uncanny sleepless dragon-flies flew and flew, passing with a gentle whirr over the boat and on over the night-lit water. And all the time somewhere something rustled, crawled, stole its way through. . . .

A week later he was turned out of the house in an ugly shameful manner, quite shattered by the horror of such a sudden and abrupt parting.

They were sitting after lunch in the drawing-room, their heads close together, looking through pictures in an old number of *Niva*.

"You haven't grown tired of me yet?" he asked quietly, pretending to look attentively at the pictures.

"Stupid. Terribly stupid!" she whispered.

Suddenly they heard soft running steps—and on the threshold in a torn black silk dressing-gown and worn-out Morocco slippers appeared her half-mad mother. Her black eyes flashed tragically. She ran forward, as if she were on the stage, and cried out:

"I understood everything! I felt it, I kept watch! You scoundrel, she will never be yours!"

And raising her arm in her long sleeve, she fired with a deafening report an ancient pistol, which Petya used to frighten away sparrows, loading it only with powder. He rushed at her through the smoke, and seized her clenched hand. She tore herself away, knocked him on the forehead with the pistol, cutting his brow which started to bleed; her cries and the pistol shot had roused the people in the house; hearing their footsteps she flung the pistol at him and began to shout even more theatrically, foaming at the mouth:

"Over my dead body only will she come to you! If she runs away with you, I shall hang myself that very

day, I'll throw myself from the roof! Get out of my house, you scoundrel! Marya Victorovna, choose between us—your mother or him!"

"You, you, mother . . ." she whispered distractedly . . .

He woke up, opened his eyes—through the black darkness the blue-mauve aperture over the door still watched him like an eye, inexorable, enigmatic—and the carriage, swaying on its springs, rushed onward at the same steady speed. Already they had left that sad little station miles and miles behind them. And all this had happened a whole twenty years ago—woods, magpies, marsh, water-lilies, snakes and storks—yes, there were storks as well—how they had all slipped out of his memory! Everything was extraordinary in that amazing summer; it was extraordinary how a pair of those storks flew at intervals to the edge of the marsh, how they allowed nobody but her to come near them, and, bending their long thin necks, scrutinized her from above with a very grave but benevolent curiosity, while she, running up to them with soft light steps in her plaited shoes, suddenly sat down on her heels, holding up her yellow sarafan over the moist warm plants on the bank, and with childish eagerness looked into the beautiful severe black pupils of their eyes, tightly encircled by dark grey rings. He watched her and them from far—through a pair of field-glasses, and saw distinctly their small glossy heads—their bony nostrils, the chinks in their huge powerful beaks, with one blow of which they could kill a snake. Their stumpy bodies and the fluffy down on their tails were tightly covered with steel-covered plumage, their scaly legs like canes were quite disproportionately long and thin—black on one of them, greenish on another. Sometimes they both stood for

whole hours on one leg, inexplicably motionless, at other times they jumped about for no apparent reason, and spread out their enormous wings; occasionally they walked about with a pompous important air, raising their feet in slow regular steps, pressing three of their toes into a ball, then stretching them out like the claws of a bird of prey, and all the time they kept on nodding their heads. . . . Of course when she ran up to them, he could think of nothing but her and saw nothing else—he could only see her raised sarafan, and a piercing languid tremor ran through him at the thought of the brown body under it, and of her little dark moles. But on that last day, that last time they were sitting together on the sofa, looking through the bound volume of old *Nivas*, she was also holding his cap in her hands, clasping it to her breast, as she had done in the boat, and she said, looking at him with a happy twinkle in her black mirror-like eyes:

"But now I love you so much that nothing is dearer to me than even that smell from inside your cap, that smell of your head and your nasty eau-de-Cologne!"

* * *

When the train had passed Kursk, they were sitting in the restaurant-car, and he drank brandy with his coffee; his wife said to him:

"Why are you drinking so much? I think that's already your fifth glass. Are you still pining for the memory of your holiday girl with the bony feet?"

"Indeed, I am pining," he answered, with a short unpleasant laugh. "The holiday girl. . . . *Amata nobis quantum amabitur nulla*!"

"Is that Latin? What does it mean?"

"You don't need to know that."

"How bad your manners are," she said, heaved a careless sigh, and began to look out of the sunlit window.

# HENRY

On a winter evening like a northern fairy tale, with lilac-coloured hoar-frost spread over the gardens, the cabman Kasatkin was driving Glebov in a tall narrow sleigh along the Tverskaya to the Loskutin hotel—they had been to Eliseyev's to buy fruit and wine. It was still light over Moscow, the pure transparent sky showed a green tint in the west, the tops of the belfries were just visible, but underneath, in the dove-coloured frosty haze, it was already dark and the lamps which had just been lit glowed with motionless and tender flames.

At the entrance to the hotel, he threw off the wolf-skin rug and ordered Kasatkin, who was spattered with snow, to come back for him within an hour:

"You will take me to the Brest station."

"Very good," answered Kasatkin. "That means you are going abroad."

"Yes, abroad."

Wheeling round his tall old horse, so that the runners creaked, Kasatkin shook his head disapprovingly.

"Desire is worse than bondage," he muttered.

The large and rather empty vestibule, the spacious lift and the bright-eyed page Vasya, with his rusty freckles, politely standing in his little uniform while the lift slowly rose upwards—suddenly Glebov felt sorry to leave all these familiar customary things behind. "Indeed, why am I going?" He looked at himself in the mirror; young, sprightly, well-bred, his eyes shone; some

snowflakes lay on his handsome moustache, his clothes were thin and well-cut—in Nice it would be wonderful just now, and "Henry" was a perfect companion . . . but above all it seemed that he would experience some unusual happiness there, a meeting . . . stopping somewhere on the way he would wonder—who lived here before him, what hung and lay in that wardrobe, whose were those hairpins lying forgotten on the side-table? Again there would be the smell of gas, coffee and beer at the Vienna station, the labels on the bottles of Austrian and Italian wine standing on the little tables in the sunny restaurant car among the snows of Semmering, the faces and clothes of European men and women, filling the carriage for lunch. . . . Then the night, Italy . . . in the morning the journey along the seashore towards Nice, stretches in the roaring smoky darkness of tunnels with faintly burning lamps on the carriage ceiling, then stops in small stations blooming with roses under a hot sun, and the tender uninterrupted lapping of the water in little coves like melted precious stones. . . . He quickly walked down the warm carpeted corridors of the Loskutin hotel.

In his room it was also warm and pleasant. An evening glow from the transparent sky still came from the window. Everything was in order, the trunks were packed. And again he felt a little sad—sad to leave this familiar room and all the winter life in Moscow, and Nadya and Ly. . . .

Nadya was due to arrive at any moment to say good-bye. He quickly hid the wine and fruit in a trunk, threw his hat and coat on the sofa behind the round table, and soon he heard a quick knock on the door. He had hardly opened it before she was already inside

embracing him, cold and tenderly fragrant, in a squirrel coat, a little squirrel cap, with all the freshness of her sixteen years; her face and her bright green eyes were flushed from the frost.

"Are you going?"

"I'm going, Nadyusha. . . ."

She sighed and sank into an arm-chair, unbuttoning her coat.

"Do you know, I was quite ill last night. . . . Oh, how I long to see you off at the station! Why won't you let me?"

"Nadyusha, you know yourself, that's impossible. I shall be seen off by people you don't know at all, you would feel yourself out of place, lonely. . . ."

"And to travel with you, I think I would give my life for that!"

"And I? But you know it's impossible. . . ."

He sat down close to her in her chair, kissing her warm neck, and he felt her tears on his cheek.

"Nadyusha, what is it?"

She lifted her face and smiled with an effort.

"No, no, I won't . . . I mustn't interfere with you like a woman; you are a poet. Freedom is essential for you. . . ."

"You are a wise little one," he said, touched by her gravity and by the expression of her childish profile—the pure, tender, blushing cheeks, the triangular cut of her half-opened lips, the innocent enquiry of those raised eyelashes with tears on them.

"You are not like other women, you are an artist yourself."

She stamped her foot.

"Don't you dare talk to me about other women!"

And with yearning eyes she whispered in his ear, caressing him with her fur and her soft breath:

"Just for a moment, now. . . ."

*   *   *

The entrance to the Brest station shone against the blue darkness of the frosty night. As he walked into the noisy station, following the hurried porter, he immediately saw Ly; tall and delicate, in a straight black Astrakhan coat and a big black velvet béret, under which long black curls hung over her cheeks, holding her hands in a large Astrakhan muff, she looked at him malevolently; her magnificent black eyes were sinister.

"So you're going away all the same, you scoundrel," she said indifferently, taking him by the arm, and stepping hurriedly along with him in her tall grey boots. "Wait a bit and you will regret, you won't win another woman like me, you'll be left with your little fool of a poetess."

"That little fool is still a mere child, Ly,—aren't you ashamed of thinking God knows what!"

"Stop talking like that. I'm not a fool. And if your 'God knows what' is true, I'll throw sulphuric acid in your face."

From the waiting train, lit from above with a row of mat electric bulbs, a cloud of hot grey steam rose up hissing, and smelling like rubber. The international carriage was distinguishable by its yellow wooden panelling. Inside, in its narrow red-carpeted corridor, its shining walls covered with stamped leather, one was already abroad. The Polish attendant in a short brown uniform coat opened the door into a small very warm

coupé, with a bed already made up, softly lit by a table-lamp under a red silk lamp-shade.

"How lucky you are," said Ly. "You even have your own toilet here. And who is next door? Perhaps some vile woman travelling-companion?" And she pulled at the door to the next coupé.

"No, it's locked. Well, God grant you happiness! Kiss me quickly, the third bell will ring in a moment. . . ."

She took her hand from her muff; it was pale, bluish, exquisitely thin, with long sharp nails; she coiled herself round him, her eyes flashed convulsively, she kissed and bit him, now on the lips, now on the cheeks, and she kept on whispering:

"I adore you, adore you, you scoundrel!"

* * *

Beyond the dark window huge orange sparks rose fantastically in the air and fell back, stretches of white snow flashed by, and black patches of pine-forest, mysterious and stern in its stillness and in the inscrutability of its wintry life. He turned off the burning hot stove under the table, drew the thick blind down over the cold glass and knocked at the door by the wash-basin, between him and the next coupé. The door opened, and "Henry" came in, laughing: she was tall, wearing a grey dress, her reddish-yellow hair arranged in a Greek style; she had fine features, like an English girl, and lively amber brown eyes.

"Well, so the good-byes are over? I heard everything I enjoyed most of all how she pulled at my door and called me a vile woman."

"Are you beginning to be jealous, Henry?"

"I'm not beginning, but I'm continuing. If she weren't so dangerous I should long ago have demanded her complete retirement."

"That's what is the matter, she's dangerous—only you just try to drop such a person quickly! But then I have to put up with your Austrian, and the thought that the day after tomorrow you will spend the night with him."

"No, I shan't spend the night with him. You know very well that I'm going there first of all in order to wind up my affairs with him."

"You could do that by writing. Then you might very well travel on with me."

She sighed and sat down, smoothing her hair with her shining fingers, touching it lightly, and stretching out her feet in their grey suede shoes with silver buckles.

"No, my friend, I want to part from him in such a way that it will be possible for me to go on working with him. He is a calculating man and a peaceful rupture will suit him. Whom can he find to replace me, who better than I can keep his newspaper supplied with all the theatrical, literary and artistic scandals of Petersburg and Moscow? Who else would translate and place with publishers his genial novelettes? Today is the fifteenth. You will be in Nice on the eighteenth, and I will be there not later than the twentieth or twenty-first. But enough of that, surely we are good friends and comrades."

"Comrades . . ." he said, looking delightedly at her delicate face with the transparent crimson flush on her cheeks. "Of course, I could never have a better comrade than you, Henry. Only with you I always feel free and at ease, one can talk to you about everything, just like with a friend, but do you know what my misfortune

is? I fall more and more in love with you."

"And where did you spend yesterday evening?"

"Yesterday evening? At home."

"And with whom? God forgive you! You were seen at night in the 'Stryelny' with a big party in a private room, with gypsies. That's a bad sign—those gypsy girls, their fateful black eyes . . ."

"And what about your Viennese tipplers, like Pshybushev?"

"They are quite accidental, my dear, and not at all in my line. Is she as good-looking as they say, that Masha?"

"Gypsy girls are not in my line either, Henry. But as for Masha . . ."

"Well now, describe her to me."

"No, you've grown positively jealous, Elena Genrykhovna. What is there to describe? Surely you've seen gypsies? She's thin, not even handsome—straight pitch-black hair, a rather coarse coffee-coloured face, quite senselessly blueish whites of the eyes, a projecting collar-bone like a horse, with some heavy yellow necklace round it, a flat stomach . . . and all that goes very well with her long silk dress, the colour of a golden onion skin. And the way she touches with her hands her heavy old silk shawl and moves forward to the music of the tambourine, her little shoes peeping out at intervals from under the hem, and her long silver ear-rings swaying—it's simply devastating! But let us go and eat."

She stood up, smiling slightly. "Let us go. You are incorrigible, my friend. But we should be content with what God gives us. Look how nice everything is here. Two marvellous little rooms!"

"And one of them quite superfluous!"

She threw over her head her knitted Russian shawl, he put on his travelling béret, and they walked swaying along the endless corridors, passing over the clanging iron platforms which bridged the cold, draughty, and snow-flecked concertina sections between the carriages.

He returned alone—she had gone ahead of him—he sat on in the restaurant and smoked. When he came back, he felt in the warm compartment the cosy happiness of a real family atmosphere. She had turned back on the bed the corner of the blanket and sheet, laid out his night-shirt, put a bottle of wine on the table, together with a wicker basket full of pears; holding hairpins between her lips, with her naked arms raised over her hair and her full breasts jutting out, she was standing in front of the mirror over the wash-basin, wearing nothing but her nightdress, with her bare feet in bedroom slippers trimmed with white fox. Her waist was slim over her heavy hips, she had graceful clear-cut ankles. He embraced her as she stood there, then they sat down on the bed and began to drink Rhine wine, kissing each other again with lips cold from the wine. He gazed admiringly at her stomach and her red-gold hair, and, uncovering her legs, feasted his eyes on their luxuriant roundness and the almond whiteness of her knees.

"And what about Ly?" she said, "and Masha?"

* * *

That night as he lay beside her in the darkness, he mused pensively, jokingly:

"Ah, Henry, how I love such nights in the train, this darkness in the swaying carriage, the lights of the

stations flashing past behind the blinds . . . And you, you human woman, source of man's eternal fascination —absolutely inexplicable, divine and devilish—and when I write about you and try to express what I feel, people accuse me of shamelessness, of vulgar sensationalism. . . . Mean souls! It is well said in one of the old books: 'An author has every right to be bold in his literary descriptions of love and character, even as painters or sculptors are always expected to render faithfully what they see; but vulgar souls will see only vulgarity even in what is beautiful or terrible'."

"Ly," asked Henry, "must, of course, have sharp little breasts, sticking out at angles? A sure sign of hysteria."

"Yes."

"Is she stupid?"

"No . . . at least, I don't know. Sometimes it seems she's very intelligent, reasonable, simple, straightforward and gay, grasps everything at the first word you say, but sometimes she bursts into such high-falutin' nonsense or such malicious bad-tempered tirades, that I just sit and listen to her numbly like an idiot, or a deaf-mute. . . . But you weary me with Ly."

"Because I don't want to be your comrade any more."

"Neither do I. And I tell you again: write to that Viennese scoundrel, that you will see him on your way back, but that just now you are unwell and must take a holiday in Nice after influenza. And let us go on, without separating, not even to Nice, but to somewhere in Italy. . . ."

"But why not to Nice?"

"I don't know. I suddenly didn't want to go there;

the main thing is—let us travel on together!"

"My dear, we spoke about this before. And why Italy? You assured me that you hate Italy."

"Yes, that's true. I bear Italy a grudge on account of our aesthetic idiots—'In Florence I care only for the trecento'—I was myself born in Beleva, and have only spent one week in Florence in my life. Trecento, quattrocento. . . . And I loathed all those Fra Angelicos, Ghirlandajos, trecento, quattrocento, and even Beatrice and the dry-faced Dante with his woman's hood and laurel wreath. . . Well, if not Italy, let us go to somewhere in the Tirol, or in Switzerland, somewhere in the mountains, some stony village in the midst of those snow-capped granite devils stretching up at the sky. . . . Just imagine; sharp damp air, wild stony huts, steep roofs huddled together in a heap alongside some jagged stone bridge, under it the rushing sound of a milky-green mountain torrent, the tinkling music of wooden bells from the closely-packed flock of sheep—a chemist and a shop with *alpenstocks*, a frightfully warm little hotel with dears' antlers hanging over the door, looking as if they had been carved out of pumice-stone . . . in a word, some high valley, which for a thousand years has lived in its natural mountain wildness aloof from the whole world—which gives birth, marries and buries, and throughout the centuries some high peak, eternally covered with snow, looks down on it from among the granite crags, like a gigantic dead angel. . . . And what girls live there, Henry! Firm, rosy-cheeked, with black corsets and red woollen stockings. . .

"Oh, my goodness, you poets!" she said, yawning indulgently. "And girls again. . . . No, it's cold in your mountain village, my dear. And I don't want any more girls. . . ."

When they arrived towards evening at the Vienna station in Warsaw, a damp wind was blowing with an occasional downpour of cold heavy drops of rain; the wrinkled cabman sitting on the box of his spacious four-wheeler, angrily urging on his pair of horses, had long tousled Lithuanian whiskers, and the rain dripped from his leather cap; the streets had a provincial look.

At dawn when he drew up the blind, he saw the plain in a pale light covered with thin snow, only reddened here and there by little red brick houses. Soon afterwards the train stopped and stood for a long time in a large station, where after Russia, everything seemed very small—the little carriages on the line, the narrow gauge of the rails, the thin iron lamp-posts—and all around lay black heaps of coal; a little soldier with a rifle, wearing a high cap shaped like a truncated cone and a short mouse-coloured cloak, walked over the line from the engine depôt; on the wooden sleepers under the windows a lanky bearded man was walking up and down, dressed in a checked jacket with a rabbit-skin collar and a green Tyrolese hat with a bright feather sticking out behind. Henry woke up and in a whisper asked him to pull down the blind. He drew it and lay down beside her under the warm blanket. She laid her head on his shoulder and burst into tears.

"Henry, what's the matter?" he said.

"I don't know, my dear, I often cry early in the morning. One wakes up and suddenly feels so sorry for oneself . . . in a few hours you will be travelling on, and I shall be left alone, sitting and waiting in a café for my Austrian . . . and in the evening once more the café and the gypsy orchestra, those violins which cut into the soul. . . ."

"Yes, yes, and those penetrating cymbals . . . I tell you, let that Austrian go to the devil and we will travel on together."

"No, my dear, we can't do that. How am I going to live if I quarrel with him? But I promise you, I shall have nothing to do with him. Do you know, the last time when I left Vienna, we had already clarified our relations—so to speak—that same night under a gas-lamp in the street. And you can hardly imagine how much hatred there was in his face! Under the gas light and pinched with rage it looked pale green, olive or pistachio green. . . . But the main thing is, how could I now, after you, after this journey which has brought us so close to each other. . . ."

"Is that true?"

She pressed him to herself and began to kiss him so strongly that he gasped for breath.

"Henry, I hardly recognize you."

"Nor I myself. But come, come to me."

"Wait a moment. . . ."

"No, no, this minute!"

"Only one word; tell me exactly when will you leave Vienna?"

"It will be this evening, this very evening!"

The train was moving again, the spurs of the frontier guards jangled softly as they passed along the carpet through the corridor.

* * *

The Vienna station smelt of gas, coffee and beer; Henry drove away, elegant and smiling sadly, in an open landau with a red-nosed cabman in a cape and shiny

top-hat; he sat on the high box, cracking and flicking his whip whenever the horse slowed down on its long attenuated aristocratic legs or trotted crookedly with its short-cropped tail in the track of a yellow tram-car.

Then came Zemmering and the whole festive air of a foreign mountain resort; he sat by the warm window in the restaurant car with a bunch of flowers, Apollinaris and a bottle of red wine on a dazzling white table, the dazzling white midday glitter of the snow-covered peaks standing out majestically against the indigo blue paradise of the sky, while the train wound along across narrow precipices, wrapped in bluish wintry early morning shadows. It was a frosty primevally innocent, pure evening, with a crimson sunset fading away over a high mountain pass, drowned with all its green fir-trees in a vast abundance of fresh and fluffy snow. Then followed a long wait in a dark gorge, alongside the Italian frontier, surrounded by mountains as black as Dante's hell, while a smoky red fire burned fitfully at the blackened mouth of the tunnel. Afterwards—everything became transformed, entirely unlike what had gone before; a shabby old Italian station with peeling pink stucco and short-legged little soldiers as proud as cocks strutting along the platform with cocks' feathers in their helmets, and instead of a station buffet—a solitary little boy, lazily pulling along the platform a barrow which displayed to view only oranges and water-melons. And farther on the freer ever-quickening movement of the train as it ran downhill, the softer warmer breezes of the Lombard plain wafted through the open windows from the dark expanse, only broken in the distance by the friendly lights of dear Italy. And before the next evening of a real summer's day—the station at Nice,

with its seasonal crowd swarming over the platforms. . . .

In the dark blue twilight, when like a curved diamond chain countless lights start to sparkle along the shore as far as the Cap d'Antibes, melting away in the west like an ash-grey ghost, he stood in his evening suit on the balcony of his hotel room facing the sea-front, thinking how at this time Moscow had twenty degrees of frost, and expecting that at any moment they would knock at his door and bring in a telegram from Henry. He dined in the hotel dining-room, under sparkling chandeliers amid black dinner-jackets and women's evening dresses, still expecting that the page-boy, in the little grey short coat cut away at the waist, wearing white knitted gloves, would respectfully bring over to him a telegram on a salver; absent-mindedly he ate the watery vegetable soup, drank red claret and waited; he took coffee, smoked in the vestibule and waited again, growing more and more agitated and surprised; what is the matter with me? Never, since my earliest youth, have I experienced anything like this! But still no telegram came! Darting about, sliding up and down in the lifts, the page-boys ran everywhere, backwards and forwards, carrying cigarettes, cigars and evening papers, then the string orchestra struck up from the balcony—still no telegram, and it was already eleven o'clock, the train from Vienna should be bringing her at midnight. After coffee he drank five glasses of brandy, and went up in the lift to his room, exhausted and resentful, frowning angrily at the uniformed boy. "Oh, what scum will grow out of these cunning, servile, already thoroughly perverted boys! And who on earth invented those idiotic little caps and cutaway coats for all those boys, grey or brown with all those epaulettes and piping?"

There was still no telegram next morning. He rang; a young footman in a tail-coat, a handsome Italian with gazelle-like eyes, brought him coffee. "*Pas de lettres, Monsieur, pas de télégrammes.*" He stood in his pyjamas in the open doorway to the balcony, screwing up his eyes from the sun and the dancing golden spots on the sea, looking on to the shore, at the thick crowd of strollers; he heard rising from a balcony below the strains of an Italian song, melting with languid happiness, and he thought with a pang of delight:

"Let her go to the devil. I understand everything."

He travelled to Monte-Carlo, gambled for a long time, and lost two hundred francs; he came back, in order to kill time, in a cab—it took him nearly three hours; *top-top, top-top Ooee!* and the whip cracked in the air abruptly like a pistol-shot. . . . The porter grinned cheerfully:

"*Pas de télégrammes, Monsieur!*"

He numbly dressed for dinner, thinking only of one thing:

"If there suddenly came now a knock at the door, and she entered, flushed with excitement, explaining as she crossed the room why she had never telegraphed, why she never arrived yesterday, I think I might die from happiness! I should tell her that never in my life have I so loved anyone in the world as I love her, that God will forgive me many things for such a love—will even forgive Nadya—take me, take the whole of me for yourself, Henry! But Henry must be dining now with her Austrian. Oh, what an ecstasy it would be—to slap her furiously in the face and to break his head with that same bottle of champagne which they were just drinking together!"

After dinner he mixed with the dense crowd walking along the esplanade; the air was warm, with a sweet smell of cheap Italian cigars; he walked alongside the jet-black sea, gazed at the diamond necklace strung out over its black curve, stretching away sadly into the distance; he went into the bars and kept on drinking brandy, gin or whisky. He returned to the hotel, white as chalk, in his white collar, white waistcoat, and top-hat, he went up to the porter with a casual air of self-importance, murmuring with inert lips:

"*Pas de télégrammes?*"

And the porter, who gave the impression that he noticed nothing, answered with cheerful readiness:

"*Pas de télégrammes, Monsieur!*"

He was so drunk that he fell asleep at once, after having only thrown off his top-hat, his overcoat and his tail-coat—he fell back on the bed and immediately his head spun round and he sank into a bottomless abyss, speckled with flaming stars.

On the third day he fell fast asleep after lunch, and when he woke up, he suddenly surveyed soberly his whole pitiful and shameful behaviour. He ordered tea to be brought to his room and began to take his clothes and suitcases out of the wardrobes, trying not to think about her any more and not to regret his senseless ruined journey. Towards evening he went down to the vestibule, ordered the bill, walked calmly over to Cooks and bought a ticket to Moscow via Venice on the evening train; I shall wake up in Venice in the morning and at three o'clock at night by direct line, without stops, I shall be at home—in the Loskutin. . . . What does he look like, that Austrian? According to Henry's descriptions and stories, he is tall, sinewy, with a gloomy

determined look—put on, of course—as he glances sideways from under his broad-brimmed hat. . . . But why think about him! There's plenty more in life. Tomorrow Venice. Songs again and the guitars of street-singers on the quay under the hotel—the sharp impassive voice of a dark-haired woman, with a shawl thrown over her shoulders, singing a duet with a triumphant tenor, short-legged, almost a dwarf, wearing a beggar's hat . . . a ragged little old man who helped one climb into the gondola—last year he helped in a fiery-eyed Sicilian woman with dangling crystal ear-rings, with a yellow spray of flowering mimosa in her olive-black hair . . . the smell of putrid water in the canals, the funereally painted interior of the gondola with its serrated plundering axe aloft on the prow, the swaying motion on the water and the young rower standing in the stern, his slim waist encircled by a red scarf, rhythmically moving to and fro, leaning vigorously on the long oar, in that classical poise with the left leg firmly planted behind. . . .

Evening approached; the pale evening sea lay calm, flat and motionless, shimmering with a greenish opal hue; the sea-gulls swooped down with angry pitiful cries, sensing bad weather to come; the misty dove-coloured west beyond the Cap d'Antibes loomed indistinctly; the small sun like a red orange disc stood over there and faded away. He gazed at it for a long time, oppressed by a slow hopeless sadness, then he turned round and walked briskly back to his hotel. "*Journaux étrangers!*" shouted the newsboy and as he ran past him he shoved a copy of *Novoe Vremya* into his hand. He sat down on a bench and began absent-mindedly turning over the pages, glancing down the

columns of the still fresh newspaper. And suddenly he jumped, stunned and blinded as if a bomb had exploded in front of him.

"Vienna, December 17th. Today, in the restaurant *Franzensring*, the well-known Austrian writer, Arthur Spiegler, shot dead with a revolver the Russian journalist and translator of many contemporary Austrian and German novelists, who works under the pseudonym of 'Henry'."

# NATALYA

## I

That was the summer when I first donned my student's cap and felt within me that surging happiness peculiar to the beginning of a free young life, and which is never repeated again. I was strictly brought up in an aristocratic family in the country; as a youth, feverishly dreaming of love, I had remained pure in soul and body, and I used to blush at the coarse remarks which fell so easily from the lips of my school comrades; they would frown slightly and taunt me: "You ought to enter a monastery, Meshchersky!" That summer I ceased to blush.

Travelling home for the holidays, I decided that the time had come for me also to be like everyone else, to put an end to my purity, and to seek a love-affair quite regardless of any deep or romantic feeling. Fortified by that decision and by the desire to show off my blue cap-band, I went off to stay with relations of mine on a neighbouring estate, hoping to find there some adventures for my heart. Thus I arrived in the house of my uncle, my mother's brother, Cherkasov, a retired guardsman and widower of long standing, the father of an only daughter, my cousin, Sonya. . . .

I arrived late in the evening and only Sonya was there to meet me. When I jumped out of the tarantass[1] and

[1] Rustic travelling carriage.

ran into the dimly lit hall, she emerged from it in a flannel dressing-gown, holding a candle in her left hand, pushed forward her cheek for me to kiss, and remarked, shaking her head with her usual playfulness:

'Well, young man, always late for everything!"

"But this time it wasn't my fault," I answered. "It was not the young man who was late, but the train."

"Don't talk so loud. Everyone is asleep. The whole evening they were dying with expectancy and impatience to see you, but they ended by giving you up. Papa went off to bed in a bad temper, scolding you as a scatter-brain, and calling Ephraim, who will probably stay at the station till the morning train—an old fool; Natalya went to bed quite offended; the servants also retired; I alone remained patient and true to you. . . . Well, take off your coat and let us go and have some supper."

I answered, fascinated by her blue eyes and by her raised arm, bare to the elbow:

"Thank you, my dear friend. It's particularly pleasant for me now to be convinced of your fidelity—you've turned into a real beauty, and I have very serious intentions about you. What a lovely arm and neck, and how seductive is that soft dressing-gown, which, I'm sure, has nothing underneath it!"

She laughed.

"Almost nothing. But you've grown up too, you're quite a man. What a keen look you have, and your funny little black moustache. . . . But something is the matter with you! During these two years in which I haven't seen you, you've changed from an eternally blushing embarrassed schoolboy into a thoroughly interesting, brazen fellow! And that would have promised us plenty of amorous delights, as our grandmothers used

to say, if it had not been for Natalya, with whom tomorrow you'll fall desperately, eternally in love."

"But who is this Natalya?" I asked, following her into the dining-room, which was lit up by a brilliant chandelier, and with windows opening on to the blackness of the warm peaceful summer night.

"She is Natasha Stankevich, my school friend, who has come to stay with me. She is really a dazzling beauty—not like me. Just imagine; a magnificent little head, so-called 'golden' hair and black eyes. Not eyes at all, but black stars, and with a truly Persian eloquence. Enormous eyelashes, of course, also black, and an amazing golden colour, her face, her shoulders, and all the rest."

"What do you mean by 'all the rest'?" I asked, more and more carried away by the tone of our conversation.

"Tomorrow morning we'll go and bathe together—I advise you to crawl into the bushes, then you will see what I mean. And she has a figure like a young nymph. . . ."

On the table in the dining-room were cold cutlets, a lump of cheese and a bottle of red Crimean wine.

"Don't be annoyed, there's nothing else," she said, sitting down and pouring out wine for me and for herself. "And there's no vodka. Well, pray to God, let's at least clink glasses with wine."

"And for what should we pray to God?"

"To find me soon a husband close at hand, who would live with us here. After all I'm nearly twenty-one, and I couldn't possibly go and marry miles away; who would look after Papa?"

"Well, may God grant it!"

And we clinked glasses; as she slowly drained hers she

again started looking at me with a strange smile; her eyes turned to my busy fork, and she murmured, as if to herself:

"Yes, you're not bad, you're really handsome, like a gypsy; you used to look so sickly with your green complexion. But you've changed a lot, you've grown elegant and agreeable. And how your eyes dance about."

"That's because you embarrass me with all your compliments. You also were not quite like that before. . . ."

And I cast a lively glance at her. She was sitting on the other side of the table, spread out in her chair, with one leg raised, crossing one plump knee over the other, sideways to me; the even sunburn of her arms glowed under the lamp, her laughing eyes shone in a bluish-purple haze, and her soft thick hair glistened with a reddish chestnut tint, it was plaited into one long pigtail for the night; the open collar of her dressing-gown displayed a round sunburnt neck and the top side of her firm round breasts, which also showed a triangular patch of sunburn; on her left cheek was a mole with a charming little tuft of dark hair.

"Well, and how is Papa?"

She continued to watch me with the same smile, took from her pocket a little silver cigarette-case and a silver match-box, and began to smoke with almost exaggerated nonchalance, leaning on her raised thigh:

"Papa, thank God, is well. He still holds himself straight, walks firmly, tapping with his crutch, ruffles up his one white curl, secretly dyes maroon-colour his side-whiskers and moustache, makes bold eyes at Christina . . . only his head goes on quivering and shaking even more persistently than before. It looks as if he can never agree with anything," she added, and

laughed. "Do you want a cigarette?"

I started to smoke, though I had never smoked before; she again filled up our glasses and gazed out into the darkness through the open window:

"Yes, for the time being we must thank God—a wonderful summer—a lovely night, ah? Only the nightingales have already stopped singing. And I'm really very glad to see you. I sent someone off to meet you as early as six o'clock, for I was afraid that the old dotard Ephraim would arrive too late for the train. I waited for you more impatiently than anyone else. And then I even felt pleased that they all went off and that you were late, at the thought of sitting alone with you when you arrived. I somehow expected you to have changed a lot—with people like you it always happens so. And you know it is such a pleasure—to sit up alone in the house on a summer night, waiting for someone from the train, and at last to hear them driving up to the porch with a tinkling of bells. . . ."

I seized her hand strongly from across the table, and squeezed it in mine, feeling already an irresistible attraction to her whole body. She with a cheerful serenity blew rings of smoke through her lips. I let go her hand and jokingly remarked:

"What are you talking about Natalya for? . . . No Natalya could ever be compared with you . . . incidentally who is she, where does she come from?"

"From near Voronezh, from a very good and old family, at one time rich, now simply paupers. They talk English and French in the house but have almost nothing to eat . . . she is a fascinating girl, beautifully built, still rather delicate. Intelligent, but very reserved, you can't discover at first whether she's intelligent or stupid. . .

The Stankeviches are fairly close neighbours of your very nice cousin Alexei Meshchersky, and Natalya says that he very often drives over to see them and complains a lot about his bachelor state. But she doesn't care for him. And besides, he's rich; people would think she married him for money—sacrificed herself for her parents."

"So it's like that," I said. "But let's get back to the point. Natalya or no Natalya, what about our romance?"

"Natalya won't interfere with our romance in any case," she answered. "You will fall madly in love with her, but you will go on kissing me. You will weep on my shoulder about her cold cruelty, and I'll console you."

"But surely you know, I've been in love with you for ages."

"Yes, but that was just ordinary calf-love for a cousin—and besides it was insufferable, you were then simply ridiculous and boring. Be that as it may, I forgive you for your former stupidity and I'm ready to renew our romance as early as tomorrow, in spite of Natalya. But meanwhile let us go to bed, I've a lot of things to attend to in the early morning."

She got up, wrapping her dressing-gown more tightly round her, took from the hall table an almost burnt-out candle and showed me to my room. And on the threshold, with that same delight and rejoicing which I had felt in my heart throughout supper—such a happy fulfilment of my desire for amorous adventures had suddenly fallen to my lot—I kissed her long and greedily, pressing her against the doorpost, and she dreamily closed her eyes, and let the guttering candle fall lower and lower. Turning away from me with a flushed face, she threatened me with her fore-finger and murmured gently:

"But you must be careful now; tomorrow, in front of all the others, don't you dare to devour me with 'passionate looks'! God forbid that Papa should notice anything. He's terribly frightened of me, but I'm even more frightened of him. And I don't want Natalya to notice anything either. I'm really very shy and modest, please don't judge me by the way I'm behaving with you. And if you don't obey my orders, you'll become repulsive to me at once. . . ."

I undressed and flung myself on the bed with my head in a whirl, but I soon fell into a sweet sleep, in no way suspecting what profound unhappiness awaited me, or that Sonya's jokes would turn out to be no jokes at all.

Afterwards I often remembered as a kind of evil omen, that when I came into my room and struck a match to light the candle, a huge bat silently darted towards me; it flew so close to my face that even by the light of the match I could see distinctly its loathsome, dark, velvety softness and its rapacious, long-eared, snub-nosed little face, like a vision of death; then, breaking away with an ugly fluttering sound, it dived into the dark depths of the open window. But at the time I forgot this incident immediately.

## II

I saw Natalya for the first time the next morning, but I only caught a fleeting glimpse of her. She suddenly emerged from the hall and entered the dining-room, looked round—her hair was not yet arranged and she was wearing a loose orange-coloured chemise—and vanished again like a flash, that orange colour showing against the clear gold of her hair and her shining black

eyes. At that moment I was alone in the dining-room; I had just finished drinking coffee—my guards-officer uncle had finished earlier and left the room—and getting up from the table I turned my head by chance. . . .

I had woken very early that morning, before anyone else in the whole house had stirred. There were so many rooms in that house and sometimes I lost my way. I woke up in a remote room, which looked out on to the shady part of the garden; I had slept soundly, I washed with alacrity, and put on nothing but clean clothes—I found it particularly pleasant to wear a new red silk peasant shirt—I brushed as smartly as possible my damp black hair, cut only yesterday in Voronezh, went out into the passage, turned into another one and found myself facing the room which served my uncle as a combined study and bedroom. Knowing that in summer he got up at five o'clock, I knocked on the door. No one answered, so I opened it, looked in and confirmed with a feeling of satisfaction the immutability of that ancient spacious room with its triple Italian window outlined against the branches of a century-old silver poplar; on the left the whole wall was covered from top to bottom with oak book-cases, in the centre between hung a mahogany clock with a brass disc on its motionless pendulum; in one corner lay a whole heap of beaded hookahs, with a barometer dangling over them; in another place stood a massive desk from my grandfather's time, its discoloured green baize cloth torn away from the walnut framework, and on it were piled up pincers, hammers, nails, and an ancient brass telescope; on the wall facing the door over the heavy wooden sofa hung a whole gallery of faded portraits in oval frames; under the window stood a writing

table and a deep arm-chair—both of huge size; a picture covered the wall on the right-hand side over the broad oak bedstead; through the blackened varnish one could faintly distinguish in the background curly wreaths of smoky cloud and romantic greenish-grey trees, but in the foreground there shone as if made from fossilized white of egg a plump, naked beauty, almost life-size, standing half-turned towards the spectator with a proud look, a voluptuous dimpled back, large firm buttocks and powerful thighs, seductively covering her nipples with the long, outstretched fingers of one hand, and with the other touching the plump folds beneath her belly. As I took all this in with my eyes, I heard behind me the strong voice of my guardsman uncle, as he approached on his crutches from the hall:

"No, my friend, you'll never find me in the bedroom at this time. Obviously you loll in bed till the sun is three oaks high."

I kissed his broad dry hand and asked:

"What oaks do you mean, Uncle?"

"It's a peasant expression," he answered, shaking his grey curl, and looking at me with his still keen and intelligent yellow eyes. " 'The sun has risen over three oaks, and you still press your nose to the pillow,' the peasants say. Well, let's go and drink coffee. . . ."

"A wonderful old man, a wonderful house," I thought, following him into the dining-room, through whose open windows the radiant morning green of the garden glittered, bringing with it all the summer charm of a country estate. The old nurse waited at table; she was small and bent; my guardsman uncle drank strong tea with cream out of a thick glass in a silver glass-holder, holding down in the glass with his broad finger the long

delicate stem of a rounded antique gold spoon; I ate rye bread in thick chunks with butter and kept on filling up my cup from the hot silver coffee-pot; my uncle, entirely absorbed in his own affairs, did not ask me a single question, but told stories about his landowner neighbours, scolding and mocking at them in every possible way; I pretended to listen, gazing at his moustache and sidewhiskers, at the thick hairs growing from the end of his nose, but all the time I was so longing for Natalya and Sonya to come in that I could hardly sit still; who was this Natalya and how would Sonya and I greet each other after yesterday? I thought of her with enthusiasm and gratitude; my thoughts wandered guiltily to her room and Natalya's, to what was happening in the early morning disorder of a young girl's bedroom. . . . Perhaps Sonya had all the same told Natalya about yesterday's awakening of our love? In that case, I felt something in the nature of love for Natalya also, not because she was said to be so beautiful, but simply because she had already become the *confidante* of my secret and Sonya's. Why should one not love two people? At any moment they would walk in, brimming over with morning freshness, would see me, my handsome southern face and red peasant shirt, would talk and laugh, sit down at the table, gracefully pouring out coffee from that same coffee-pot—that healthy youthful appetite, youthful morning excitement, the sparkle of well-rested eyes, the light bloom of powder on cheeks somehow grown even younger after sleep, and those peals of laughter following every other word, not wholly sincere but all the more enchanting. . . . Then after breakfast they would walk through the garden to the river, would undress and bathe, the blue

sky shedding light over their naked bodies from above and from below the reflections from the transparent water. . . . My imagination was always lively—I formed a mental picture of how Sonya and Natalya stood, holding on to the balustrade of the swimming bath, uneasily descending into the water down steps which were damp, cold and slippery from the repulsive velvety green weed growing over them, how Sonya, throwing back her head and luxuriant hair, suddenly dived in with determination—and with her body strangely visible through the chalky grey water threw out her arms and legs in jerky angular movements, just like a frog. . . .

"Well, till lunch-time; remember, lunch is at twelve," pronounced my uncle, shaking his head, and stood up; his chin was clean-shaven, his moustache and side-whiskers maroon-coloured; he was tall, with an old man's sternness; dressed in an ample tussore suit with square-toed slippers, he held the crutch in his broad fingers; tapping me on the shoulder, he hurried out of the room. It was at that moment, when I too stood up to go through the next room on to the balcony, that she darted in and disappeared in the twinkling of an eye, filling me suddenly with delighted admiration. I walked out on the balcony in a dazed state; indeed she was a beauty!—and for a long time I stood there, collecting my thoughts. I had waited so impatiently for them in the dining-room, but when at last I heard them in the dining-room from the balcony, I suddenly rushed out into the garden—I was seized by a sudden fear of both—with one of them I already shared a fascinating secret, but I felt still more shy of Natalya, who had blinded me by her sudden apparition half an hour ago. I wandered through the garden, which clung, like the whole estate, to its

unchanging riparian country style; at last, mastering my feelings, I came in, wearing an assumed air of simple indifference, and met the gay bold glances of Sonya and the charming humour of Natalya who, with a smile, looked at me from under dark lashes with her shining black eyes, which contrasted so strikingly with the light colour of her hair.

"We have already met!" she exclaimed.

Afterwards we stood together on the balcony, leaning on the stone balustrade, and surrendered to the pleasant sensation of baking ourselves in the summer sun; Natalya stood next to me, and Sonya, vaguely embracing her and glancing into the distance, began to sing softly:

"In the midst of the crowded clamorous ball, I chanced . . ."

Then she stood erect and exclaimed:

"Well, let's go and bathe! It's our turn first, you go afterwards, my boy. . . ."

Natalya ran off to fetch some towels, but Sonya held me back and whispered in my ear:

"From today onwards you may pretend that you're in love with Natalya. But be on your guard if it ever turns out that you don't need to pretend any more!"

I was about to answer with a daring joke, but it was unnecessary, for she added quietly, with a glance at the door, "I'll come to you after lunch. . . ."

When they returned, I made my way to the swimming-pool—first down the long birch avenue, then I passed among huge old trees of various kinds which grew on the riverbank, exuding a warm smell of fresh water; rooks were cawing loudly in their upper branches. I walked on and thought again with completely contradictory feelings about Natalya and Sonya, about how I was

going to bathe in the same water in which they had bathed. . . .

After lunch in the midst of that happy, aimless, serene and gentle peace which looked in from the garden through the open windows—the clear sky, the green leaves and the sun—after that leisurely feast of cold kvass soup, juicy roast chicken and raspberries with cream, during which my heart kept on secretly fluttering because of Natalya's presence and because I was awaiting that hour when the whole house would sink into slumber during the siesta, and Sonya (who entered the dining-room with a dark-red velvety rose in her hair) would secretly visit me, to resume without reserve yesterday's hurried beginning—I went to my room at once and drew the window-blinds. Then I waited for her, lying on the Turkish sofa, listening to the warm stillness of the atmosphere and the already languid post-midday song of the birds in the garden; the sweet air from flowers and grass was wafted through the window blinds and all the time one and the same thought filled my mind; how could I go on living now this double life?—secret meetings with Sonya but so close to Natalya, the mere thought of whom filled me with the pure enthusiasm of love, with such a passionate dream to see her always with that same delighted adoration with which just now I had looked at her graceful stooping figure, at her sharp girlish elbows, as she leaned half-standing on the sun-baked stone balustrade! Sonya, also leaning beside her and with one arm round her shoulder, was wearing a muslin *peignoir,* looking like a young girl who had just married, but her friend was in a linen skirt and an embroidered Ukrainian blouse, which hinted at the fresh perfection of her almost juvenile body. My greatest

joy was that I did not dare even to visualize the possibility of kissing her with those same feelings with which yesterday I had kissed Sonya! Through the broad translucent sleeve of her blouse, embroidered with red and blue designs on the shoulders, I could see her slender arm, with little auburn hairs growing on the dark golden skin—I gazed and thought; what would I experience if I dared to touch them with my lips! And feeling my look, she turned her shining black eyes towards me; she wore her thick pigtail wound tightly round her lovely little head. I moved away and hurriedly lowered my eyes, when I caught a glimpse of her legs through the folds of her skirt, on which the sun was shining, and saw her strong, delicate, aristocratic ankles beneath the transparent grey stockings. . . .

Sonya, with a rose in her hair, briskly opened and shut the door, exclaimed softly: "What, you were asleep!" I jumped up: "What are you saying? How could I possibly sleep?"—and I seized her hands. "Lock the door. . . ." I threw myself on the floor, and she sat down on the sofa closing her eyes. . . . "Well, come to me"—and we at once lost all restraint and sense of shame. We hardly spoke during those moments, and she in all the glory of her warm body allowed me to kiss her—everywhere—but only to kiss—and the more sternly she closed her eyes, the more her face burned. And again, as she left the room, smoothing her hair, she raised a threatening forefinger:

"And as for Natalya, I repeat to you; take care not to go beyond pretence. I'm far from having such a nice character as you may think!"

Her rose had fallen to the floor. I hid it in a corner of the table, and towards evening its dark-red velvet had

faded into violet and turned limp.

III

My life continued outwardly in the same daily round, but inwardly I knew not a single moment of peace. I was growing more and more attached to Sonya, to the sweet repetition of those exhausting passionate meetings with her at night—now she only came to me late in the evening when the whole house was already asleep—yet I secretly followed with increasing anguish and ardour, every step, every movement of Natalya's. Everything pursued the normal course of summer in the country; meetings in the morning, bathing before lunch, then lunch followed by the rest in one's room, then the garden—they sat over some embroidery work on a bench in the birch avenue and insisted on my reading Goncharov aloud, or they made jam in a shady clearing under the oak trees, not far from the house to the right of the balcony; at five o'clock we drank tea in another shady clearing on the left; in the evening we went for walks or played croquet on the broad lawn in front of the house—I played with Natalya against Sonya or Sonya with Natalya against me—it was twilight when we had supper in the dining-room. . . . After supper my guardsman uncle went to bed, but we sat for a long time on the dark balcony, Sonya and I indulging in jokes and smoking, and Natalya in silence. At last Sonya would say: "Well, it's time for bed!" Taking leave of them, I went to my room, and waited with chill hands for that appointed hour when the whole house was in darkness and so still that I could hear the uninterrupted ticking of my watch by the bedside, under the light of a guttering candle: I lay full of wonder and foreboding; why

had God punished me like this, why had he sent me two loves at once, each so different and each so passionate, such a tormenting beautiful adoration of Natalya, and such a physical rapture for Sonya? I felt that we could not much longer endure our incomplete intimacy, that I should go mad in the anticipation of our nightly meetings and from the sensations which they left all day within me—and all that with Natalya alongside! Sonya was already jealous, sometimes she flared up threateningly, and said to me when we were alone together:

"I'm afraid that you and I behave awkwardly at meals and in front of Natalya. Papa, it seems to me, begins to suspect something, Natalya too, and Nanny, of course, is convinced we're in love and probably tells tales to Papa. Sit more often in the garden with Natalya, read aloud to her that intolerable *Precipice*, take her away for walks sometimes in the evening. . . . It's terrible, of course—I notice how idiotically you roll your eyes at her; at times I hate you, I'm ready, like some peasant girl, to pull out your hair in front of everybody—but what can I do?"

Worst of all, it seemed to me Natalya began to feel, not without pain and indignation, that some secret tie bound me to Sonya. Always reserved, she became more silent than ever, played croquet or worked at her embroidery with exaggerated concentration. We had somehow grown accustomed to each other, and drawn closer together; one day, sitting alone with her in the drawing-room, while she was turning over sheets of music on the sofa, I remarked jokingly:

"I heard, Natalya, that maybe we shall soon become relations."

She glanced round at me sharply.

"How is that?"

"My cousin, Alexei Nikolaevich Meshchersky. . . ."

She interrupted me before I could finish:

"Ah, so that's it. Your cousin—excuse me—that overfed lisping giant covered with thick black hair, with a red slobbering mouth. . . . And what right have you to talk to me like this?"

I was frightened.

"Natalya, Natalya, why are you so severe with me? Can't I even make a joke? Only forgive me," I said, taking her hand.

She did not withdraw her hand and answered:

"I still don't understand you . . . or know you. . . . But enough of that. . . ."

Her white tennis shoes hung down from the sofa; I got up and went on to the balcony. The light from the garden was dim and clouded, in the air was a soft summer rustling, a sweetly scented moist breeze blew from the fields, and I suddenly felt so sweetly and freely overwhelmed by such an inexplicable all-embracing happiness, that I cried out:

"Natalya, come here for a moment."

She came to the threshold.

"What is it?"

"Breathe in—what a breeze! How joyful everything might be!"

She was silent.

"Yes."

"Natalya, how cold you are to me. Have you something against me?"

She shrugged her shoulders proudly:

"Why should I have anything against you?"

In the evening, lying in the darkness on the balcony in our wicker chairs, we all three remained silent—the stars twinkled between the dark clouds; a faint breeze stirred from the direction of the river, where the frogs croaked drowsily.

"Rain is coming. I want to sleep," said Sonya, stifling a yawn. "Nanny said the new moon is due, and we shall be 'washed' for a whole week." After a pause she added: "Natalya, what do you think about first love?"

Natalya answered through the darkness:

"I'm convinced of one thing; the appalling difference between the first love of a young man and of a girl."

Sonya reflected for a moment.

"Well, and even girls are very different. . . ."

Then she stood up, and said in a determined tone:

"No, we must go to sleep!"

"And I shall doze here for a little. I like the night air," said Natalya.

I whispered, listening to Sonya's footsteps, as they died away:

"We said something wrong just now."

She answered:

"Yes, yes, we spoke unjustly. . . ."

The following day we met each other with outward calm. Quiet rain fell all night, but by morning the weather had improved; after lunch it was dry and warm. Before tea, about five o'clock, when Sonya was dealing with some household accounts in my uncle's study, we were sitting in the birch avenue and trying to continue reading *The Precipice* aloud. She was leaning over her sewing, her right hand moving quickly up and down; I was reading and from time to time glanced with sweet longing at her left arm, at the reddish gold hairs growing

just above her wrist, and on the place where her neck joined her shoulders, and I read on with still greater animation, though without taking in a single word. At last I said:

"And now, will you read, please. . . ."

She drew herself up; the shape of her breasts was outlined under her thin blouse; she lay aside her sewing, bent down her strangely beautiful head showing the nape of her neck and shoulders, placed the book on her knees and began to read in a rapid, uncertain voice. The call of golden-crested tits sounded from various parts of the twilit garden; in front of us, pressed against the trunk of a solitary pine-tree growing in the avenue among the birches, hung a reddish-grey woodpecker. . . .

"Natalya, what a wonderful colour your hair is! And your pigtail is just a little darker, the colour of ripe Indian corn. . . ."

She went on reading.

"Natalya, look, a woodpecker!"

She looked up:

"Yes, yes, I saw it before, and just now, and yesterday. . . . Don't interrupt my reading."

I fell silent, but soon spoke again:

"Look, one would think they were dried-up grey worms."

"What, where?"

I pointed to the bench beside us, covered with dry greyish birds' droppings:

"Isn't it true?"

I seized and pressed her hand, bubbling over and laughing with happiness:

"Natalya, Natalya!"

She looked at me quietly and steadily, and after

a pause she said:

"But surely you love Sonya!"

I blushed, like a criminal caught in the act, but repudiated Sonya with such impulsive haste, that her lips parted in astonishment.

"Isn't it true?"

"It's not true, not true! Of course I'm very fond of her, but like a sister; after all, we've known each other since childhood!"

## IV

The following day she failed to appear either in the morning, or for lunch—"Sonya, what's the matter with Natalya?" asked my uncle, and Sonya answered with a rather malicious smile:

"She's been lying in her nightgown the whole morning, with her hair not even brushed; one can tell from her face that she's been crying; I brought her coffee—she wouldn't drink it. . . . What's the reason? Her head aches. Or can she have fallen in love?"

"Simple enough," said my uncle briskly, casting an approving glance at me, but shaking his head.

Natalya only came down for tea in the evening, but stepped on to the balcony with a light and lively air, surprising me by her animation, her smile, and by a certain novel smartness; her hair was tightly coiled, a little higher in front with wavy curls; she wore another dress, all in green, very simple and graceful, particularly in the way it fitted round her waist—her slippers were black and on high heels—I gasped inwardly with fresh rapture. I was sitting on the balcony, looking through the *Historical Journal,* a few volumes of which my uncle had given me, when she suddenly burst in with all that

lively charm and slight embarrassment;

"Good evening. Let's go and drink tea. Today I preside at the samovar. Sonya is unwell."

"How is that, first you, then her?"

"I simply had a headache all the morning. I'm ashamed to say I've only just now got myself straight. . . ."

"How marvellous that green colour looks with your eyes and hair!" I said. Then suddenly I asked with a blush: "You didn't believe me yesterday?" She also blushed—a pale crimson—and turned her head away:

"Not at once, not entirely. Then I began to reflect that really I had no grounds not to believe you . . . and that your feelings for Sonya were no business of mine whatsoever. But let us go . . . ."

Sonya came down to supper and seized an opportunity to murmur to me:

"I'm unwell. With me this always takes an acute form, and I have to stay in bed for five days. I can still move about now, but tomorrow I shall have to lie still. Behave sensibly without me. I love you passionately and I'm terribly jealous."

"Couldn't you look in on me even for a minute later today?"

"You're stupid!"

This was happiness and unhappiness combined; five days of complete freedom with Natalya and five days without seeing Sonya in my room at night!

That week Natalya took over the housekeeping, organized everything, walked to and fro in a white apron between the courtyard and the kitchen—I had never seen her so busy—evidently she derived great satisfaction from taking Sonya's place and playing the part of a thoughtful housewife—and she seemed to take a rest

from that secret attention which she had paid to what Sonya and I were saying, or to the way in which we exchanged looks. All these days she at first worried whether everything would be all right at meals, but soon she was satisfied that all went well; the old cook and Christina, the Ukrainian housemaid, brought everything in and served each dish punctually, without irritating my uncle; after lunch she went to Sonya's room, where I was not admitted, and stayed with her till tea-time, and after supper she again spent the whole evening with her. Obviously she avoided being left alone with me, and I was perplexed, and suffered from loneliness. Why, if she had grown friendlier, did she avoid me? Was she frightened of Sonya or of herself, of her feelings for me? And I longed to believe it was of herself, and I got carried away by still more vivid dreams; I was not bound eternally to Sonya, I could not stay here for ever as a guest—nor could Natalya—in a week or two I should have to go away in any case—and that would put an end to my torment. . . .

I would find a pretext to go over to make the acquaintance of the Stankeviches, as soon as Natalya returned home. . . . To leave Sonya, with a lie in my heart, haunted by that secret dream of Natalya, with the hope that she would one day love and marry me, was bound to be a very painful experience—was it only blind passion when I kissed Sonya, did I not love her also?—but what could I do, sooner or later I must face the issue. . . . With such thoughts constantly in my mind, in a state of uninterrupted spiritual anguish and expectancy, I tried in my meetings with Natalya to show as much restraint and amiability as I could—and I exercised an endless patience. I suffered and felt bored

—as if on purpose it rained for three whole days, the drops in their thousands pattered steadily down on the roof; the house was gloomy, flies went to sleep on the ceiling and round the lamps in the dining-room—but I did not lose heart, sometimes I sat for hours in my uncle's study, listening to his varied store of anecdotes. . . .

Sonya started to appear again in a dressing-gown, at first only for an hour or two, languidly smiling at her own weakness; she lay down in a canvas chair on the balcony, and, to my dismay, addressed me in a capricious tone but with an inappropriate excess of affection, and without worrying about Natalya's presence:

"Sit down beside me, Vitik, I feel sick and depressed, tell me something amusing. . . . It's true the new moon came to wash us, but it seems to me it has already washed us enough; the weather will soon change, how sweetly the flowers smell after the rain. . . ."

I answered, with suppressed irritation:

"If the flowers smell so strongly, there will be another downpour."

She slapped my hand:

"Don't you dare to contradict an invalid!"

At length she started to come down for meals and for tea in the evening, but she was still pale and always sat in an arm-chair. She did not yet appear for supper or sit on the balcony afterwards. Once Natalya said to me after evening tea, when Sonya had retired to her room and Christina had removed the samovar from the table to the pantry:

"Sonya is annoyed that I sit with her all the time, that you are always alone. She's not yet well, and you are bored without her."

"I'm only bored without you," I answered. "When

you're not there. . . ."

Her face changed, but she quickly regained her self-control and said with a forced smile:

"But we agreed not to quarrel any more. . . . You'd better listen to me; you've been sitting at home all day; go out for a walk till supper, and afterwards I'll sit with you in the garden; that prophecy about the moon has not yet been fulfilled, thank God, the night will be beautiful. . . ."

"Sonya is sorry for me. Aren't you? not even a bit?"

"Terribly sorry," she answered and laughed uneasily as she put the teacups on the tray. "But, thank God, Sonya is well again; soon you won't be bored any more. . . ."

At those words "I'll sit with you in the garden", I felt a sweet mysterious pang in my heart, but then I thought, "that's all very well, it's just a kind word!" I went to my own room and lay for a long time staring up at the ceiling. At last I rose, took my cap and stick from the hall, and almost unconsciously walked out of the park onto the wide road between the park and the village. The road led through the empty twilit fields. Though the ground was studded with hillocks, it gave a sense of endless space and a wide view on every side. To my left lay the river valley, beyond it stretched empty fields, slightly rising towards the horizon, where the sun was just setting in a burning crimson sky. To the right an even row of little white cottages reflected the red glow like a burnt-out village, and I looked sadly now at the sunset, now at them. When I turned back, a warm almost hot wind was rising and the young moon already shone in the sky, a glittering semi-circle which promised

nothing good; the other half was just visible like a translucent cobweb; the whole reminded me of some strange acorn.

During supper—we were eating this time in the garden, it was so hot in the house—I said to my uncle:

"Uncle what do you think about the weather? It seems to me it will rain tomorrow."

"Why, my friend?"

"I've just been out in the fields, and I was thinking so sadly that I have to leave you soon."

"Why is that?"

Natalya also raised her eyes and looked at me:

"Are you going away?"

I smiled with an effort.

"Well, I can't just . . ."

My uncle shook his head energetically, this time with relevance.

"Rubbish, rubbish! Your papa and mamma can very well endure your absence a little longer. I won't let you go for another two weeks at least. And she won't let you go either."

"I have no claims on Vitaly Petrovich," said Natalya.

I exclaimed in a pitiful tone:

"Uncle, you really must forbid Natalya to address me like that!"

The guardsman thumped the table with his fist.

"I forbid it! And no more chatter about your departure. As for the rain, maybe you're right, it's quite likely that the weather will change for the worse."

"It was too clear and still in the fields," I said. "And the moon is very bright and looks like an acorn; the wind blows from the south, clouds are gathering already. . . ."

The guardsman turned round, looked into the depths

of the garden, where the moonlight faded and grew brighter at intervals:

"You'll turn into a professional weather prophet, Vitaly. . . ."

At ten o'clock she came out on to the balcony, where I was sitting and waiting for her, thinking despondently: this is all nonsense; if she has any feelings for me, they are ephemeral, not serious, only passing moods. . . . The young moon played with changing lights in the embrace of ever more thickly accumulating misty white clouds, which rolled majestically across the sky, and when its white half pierced through them, brilliant and deathly pale like a human face in profile, everything around lit up, changed and suffused with a phosphorescent glow. Suddenly I looked round, feeling something. Natalya was standing on the threshold, her hands folded behind her back, silently gazing at me. I stood up; she remarked indifferently:

"So you've not gone to sleep yet."

"But you told me . . ."

"Forgive me. I'm very tired now. Let us walk down the avenue, and then I shall go to bed."

I followed her. She paused on the steps of the balcony, looking at the tree-tops in the garden, beyond which banks of cloud were piling up, streaked with inaudible flashes of lightning. Then she walked under the long transparent awning of the birch avenue, among the mottled patches of light and shade. I caught her up, and remarked, in order to say something:

"How the birches shine like magic. There is nothing stranger and more beautiful than the inside of a forest on a moonlit night and this white silken glitter of the birch trunks in the depths. . . ."

She stopped, looking me straight in the face with her black eyes:

"Are you really going away?"

"Yes, it's high time."

"But why so suddenly and so soon? I must admit, you surprised me just now when you said you were going."

"Natalya, may I visit you and meet your family when you return home?"

She made no reply. I took her hand, and kissed it; my heart stood still.

"Natalya . . ."

"Yes, yes, I love you," she said, and hurriedly, without another word, turned back towards the house. I followed her like a dazed lunatic.

"Go away tomorrow," she said as she walked, without turning round. "I shall return home in a few days."

## V

Going back to my room, I sat down on the sofa, without lighting my candle, stunned by that terrible and wonderful thing, which, so suddenly, so unexpectedly, had happened in my life. I sat, losing all conception of place and time. My room and the garden were already shrouded in complete darkness by the clouds; the wind whistled and sighed outside, and greenish-blue flashes, which vanished in one second, kept on lighting up the room. These lightning flashes without thunder became more and more frequent and powerful; then the room suddenly shone with such an uncanny brilliance, a torrent of howling wind burst in from the garden, as if panic-stricken from the earth and sky which had caught fire! I jumped up, closed with an effort my windows one after the other, fighting against the wind, and ran on

tiptoe down the dark passages into the dining-room; at that moment I was far from thinking about open windows in the dining-room and drawing-room, where the storm might have broken the panes, yet I ran in to look with genuine concern. All the windows seemed to be closed–I saw them lit up by a greenish blue flash of quite unearthly brilliance which revealed every detail with its inhuman eyes, and magnified the window frames, but was drowned at once in a thick blackness, leaving on the blinded vision a trace of something harsh and red. When I quickly re-entered my room, almost frightened that something had happened there while I was away, I heard through the darkness an angry whisper:

"Where were you? I'm frightened. Light the candle quickly. . . ."

I struck a match which showed Sonya sitting on the sofa in her nightgown with slippers on her naked feet.

"But no, no, there's no need for it," she exclaimed hurriedly, "come to me quickly, embrace me, I'm afraid. . ."

I sat down submissively, embraced her cold shoulders. She whispered:

"Well, kiss me, kiss me, take me, I'm yours, I haven't been with you for a whole week!"

And with a strong movement she flung herself and me on to the cushions of the sofa.

At that very moment Natalya in her nightdress, carrying a candle, appeared on the threshold of the open door. She saw us at once, but cried out involuntarily:

"Sonya, where are you? I'm terribly afraid . . ."

She quickly vanished. Sonya dashed after her.

## VI

A year later Natalya married Meshchersky. They were married on his estate in an empty church—we, like other friends and relatives on his and her side, received no invitations to the wedding. And the newly-married couple did not even pay the usual courtesy visits after the wedding; they left at once for the Crimea.

In the following January, on Tatyana's saint's day, the students of Voronezh gave a ball in the Noblemen's Club there. I was already a student at Moscow University, was spending the Christmas holidays at home in the country, and travelled that night to Voronezh. The train arrived completely white, covered with steaming snow; as I drove to the hotel in a hired sleigh through the raging storm, I could hardly catch more than fleeting glimpses of the street lamps. But after the country the stormy town and the town lights excited me, they promised me the approaching satisfaction of entering a warm—even over-heated—room in an old provincial hotel, of asking for a samovar and changing my clothes, preparing for a long night at the ball with plenty of drinks till dawn. Since that terrible night in the Cherkasovs' house, and then after her marriage, I had gradually recovered—at least I had grown used to that suppressed state of spiritual sickness and suffering—and I lived outwardly like everyone else.

When I arrived, the ball was just beginning, but the grand staircase and the landing were already packed with people. In the gallery of the principal ball-room the regimental band was playing, drowning all other sounds in the loud strains of a majestically melancholy waltz. Still fresh from the frosty night air, very smartly dressed

in my new uniform, I made my way through the crowd with exaggerated politeness, mounting the red-carpeted steps of the staircase; I soon found myself on the landing, plunged into an even thicker and hotter crowd grouped round the doorways, and began to elbow my way through so insistently that I was probably taken for a functionary with some indispensable role to perform in the ball-room. At last I got through, and stopped on the threshold, listening to the peals and outbursts of the orchestra right over my head, glancing at the glittering crystal chandeliers and at the dozens of varied couples waltzing away under them. Suddenly I started backwards—amidst that whirling crowd one single pair had detached itself in front of my eyes, gliding with rapid graceful steps in my direction. I recoiled as I saw him, slightly stooping as he waltzed, tall, stout, and dark, with shiny black hair and a black tail-coat, but agile with that astonishing grace which fat people often have when they dance, and her, so tall in her stately head-dress and beautifully shaped golden slippers, leaning slightly back as she glided round, with downcast eyes, one hand resting on his shoulder, her white glove curving up over her elbow so that her arm looked like a swan's neck. For a moment her dark eyelashes quivered as her black eyes flashed straight in front of me, quite close to where I stood, but then he, turning on his heels, with agile assiduity, swung her round abruptly in the opposite direction; her lips opened with a sigh as she glided back, and the hem of her silvery skirt gleamed for a moment before they disappeared once more among the dancing crowd. I turned and elbowed my way through to the landing, and having got there, stood still for a moment. . . . Through the doors of the

rooms on the opposite side, still empty and cool, I noticed two girl students in Ukrainian dress, standing idly near the buffet with its bottles of champagne—one of them was a pretty blonde, the other a dry dark-skinned Cossack beauty, almost twice her height. I went over to them, and held out with a bow a hundred rouble note. They bumped their heads and burst out laughing, as they stooped to pull out a heavy bottle from the ice-bucket behind the bar; then they exchanged undecided glances—none of the bottles had yet been uncorked. I went behind the bar and in a minute boldly drew out the cork. I gaily offered them each a glass—*Gaudeamus igitur*!—the rest I drank myself, filling one glass after another. They looked at me, first with surprise, then with pity:

"Oh, you're so terribly pale!"

I drained the last glass and left immediately. In the hotel I asked for a bottle of Caucasian brandy to be sent up to my room, and I began to drink it in teacupfuls, hoping that my heart would burst. . . .

Another year and a half passed. One day at the end of May when I was again at home on holiday from Moscow, a messenger brought a telegram from her from Blagodatnoye: "Alexei Nikolaevich died suddenly this morning after a stroke". Father crossed himself and said:

"God be merciful to him. How dreadful! May God forgive me, I never loved him, but all the same it is dreadful. Surely he was still under forty. I'm terribly sorry for her—a widow at her age, with a child on her hands. . . . I never met her—he was so considerate that he never even once brought her over to see me—but they say she is enchanting. What will happen now? Neither I nor your mother, at our age, can travel a

hundred and fifty versts, so you will have to go. . . ."

It was impossible to refuse. On what pretext could I have refused? Nor could I have refused in that state of semi-madness which suddenly came over me on receiving this news. I knew only one thing; I would see her! The reason for visiting her was terrible, but quite legitimate.

We sent a telegram in reply, and the following day at sunset the horses from Blagodatnoye fetched me from the station to the estate. Driving downhill alongside water meadows I saw from far that on the west side of the house, facing the still brilliant sunset, all the main windows had their shutters down, and I shuddered at the horrible thought; he was lying dead behind them and she was there! In the courtyard, thickly overgrown with young grass, the sleigh-bells were tinkling on two *troikas* drawn up alongside the coachhouse, though not a soul was there, except the coachmen on the box—both visitors and servants were already attending the requiem service in the house. Everywhere reigned the stillness of a country evening in May, a sunset purity, freshness and novelty—the air from the meadows and the river, that lusty young grass in the courtyard, the luxuriant garden adjoining the house from the back and on the south side—but in the porch at the main entrance, the door of which stood wide open, a large yellow brocaded coffin-lid lay upright against the wall. The slightly chilly evening air held a sweet smell of pear-blossom from thick milky-white clusters on the south-east side of the garden, which stood out against the clear translucent horizon, where rosy Jupiter was the only visible star. The freshness and beauty of all this, the thought of her own beauty and youth, and of how

she once loved me, suddenly tore my heart with such regret, such rapture and such a longing for love, that, as I jumped from the carriage on to the steps, I felt I was standing on the edge of an abyss—how could I enter that house, see her again face to face after three years of separation—already a widow and a mother! Nevertheless I went through into that dim incense-laden dreadful room, glimmering with yellow flames from the candles held in the darkness by people standing round the catafalque, which lay at an angle with its head on the corner, lit from above by a large red lamp in front of a gold-embossed ikon, and from below by the liquid silvery glow of three enormous church candles. I walked past the intoning and chanting priests, who moved near the catafalque waving their censers and bowing to the ground, and at once I lowered my eyes in order not to see the yellow brocade on the catafalque and the face of the dead man—most of all I feared to see her. Someone handed me a lighted candle; I took it and stood still holding it, feeling how it flickered, warming and lighting up my pale pinched face; with numb resignation I listened to that chanting and to the swinging sound of the censers, and I glanced sideways at the sweet-smelling smoke as it rose majestically towards the ceiling; suddenly my raised eyes caught sight of her—standing right in front, with a candle in her hand which lit up her cheek and the gold of her hair—and, as though she were herself an ikon, I could not tear my eyes away from her. When the service was over, silence fell and the room smelt of extinguished candles; everyone moved softly forward and came to kiss her hand; I lingered behind in order to come last. Approaching her, I gazed with awe and wonder at her graceful nun-like figure, at her black dress, which

only emphasized her extraordinarily innocent look, at the pure youthful beauty of her face, eyelashes and eyes, which fell lower when they saw me; I bowed very low, kissed her hand, in a scarcely audible voice uttered those few words which convention and our kinship demanded, and asked for permission to leave the next morning and to spend the night in the old rotunda in the garden, where I had slept when I used to visit Blagodatnoye as a schoolboy—Meshchersky had slept there on the hottest summer days. She answered, without raising her eyes:

"I will give orders at once for you to be shown over there and given supper."

The next morning, I went away immediately after the funeral service and burial.

Taking leave of her, we again only exchanged a few insignificant words and again did not look each other in the eyes.

## VII

Soon after I had finished my university course, both my father and mother died at nearly the same time; I settled down in the country, busied myself with the estate, and started to live with an orphan peasant girl, Gasha, who had been brought up in our house and used to look after my mother's rooms. . . . Now she served me, together with Ivan Lukich, our former house-servant, a grey-haired old man with large shoulder-blades. She still looked almost like a child—small, thin, dark-haired, with completely expressionless jet-black eyes; strangely silent, she seemed indifferent to everything and her delicate skin was so dark that my father used to say: "Well, probably Agar looked like that." She was infinitely dear to me, I loved to carry her in my arms, kissing her; I

thought, "She is all I have left in life!" and it seemed that she guessed my thoughts. When she gave birth to a tiny little dark boy, stopped working and moved into my former nursery, I wanted to marry her. But she answered:

"No, I don't need that, I should only be ashamed in front of everybody, what a fine lady I should make! And why should you marry me? It would only make you grow tired of me sooner. You need to go to Moscow, otherwise you'll get bored with me. And I shan't be lonely now," she said, looking at the child in her arms who was sucking at her breast. "Travel away for a change, live as you feel like, only remember one thing; if you really fall in love with someone and want to marry her, then without a moment's hesitation I'll drown myself with him together."

I looked at her; it was impossible not to believe her. I bowed my head; it is true I was only twenty-six . . . to fall in love, to marry—I simply could not imagine such things, but Gasha's words reminded me again of my finished life.

In the early spring I went abroad and spent four months there. On my way home through Moscow at the end of June, I was thinking of my plans; I would spend the autumn in the country, and go away again in the winter. On the journey from Moscow to Tula a calm sadness weighed on me. So I am home again, but what for? I recalled Natalya—and shrugged my shoulders; yes, that love "unto death", which Sonya had jokingly foreseen, really existed; only I had got used to it, like a person who in course of time learns to do without something which has been cut away from him, like the loss of an arm or a leg. . . . Sitting in the Tula station waiting for

the next train, I sent a telegram: "I pass near you on my way from Moscow, and stop at your station at 9 p.m.; may I come to see you and enquire how you are?"

She met me in the porch—a maid was holding a lamp behind her—and she stretched out both hands to me with a half-smile:

"I'm terribly glad to see you!"

"Strange as it seems, you've grown a little taller," I said, kissing her hands with a twinge of pain. I looked up at her in the light of the lamp held by the maid; round its glass little pink moths were fluttering in the soft air after the rain; her black eyes had now a firmer, more self-reliant expression, she was in the full bloom of young womanly beauty, erect, modestly elegant, wearing a dress of green tussore.

"Yes, I'm still growing," she answered, smiling sadly.

In the hall near the entrance a large red lamp hung as before in front of some gold-framed ikons, but it was not lit. I hastily averted my eyes from it and followed her into the dining-room. There on a dazzling white table-cloth stood a tea-kettle on a spirit lamp and fine porcelain cups and saucers. The maid brought in some cold veal, some pickles, a carafe with vodka and a bottle of Lafitte. She poured out tea:

"I don't eat supper, and only drink tea, but you must eat something first. . . . So you've come from Moscow? Why is that? What can you do there in summer?"

"I was on my way back from Paris."

"Really! And were you there for long? Oh, if only I could go away somewhere. But my baby girl is only three. . . . I hear you are quite absorbed in agriculture?"

I drank a glass of vodka, and asked if I might smoke.

"Oh, please do."

I lit a cigarette and said:

"Natalya, you needn't be socially amiable with me, and don't pay any particular attention to me, I came here solely to see you and then to slip away again. And don't feel shy—surely, everything that happened is grown over and past beyond recall. You can't fail to see that I am still blinded by you, but my admiration can't embarrass you now—now it is disinterested and calm. . . ."

She lowered her head and her eyelashes—their wonderful contrast was something which no one could ever get used to—and her face started to blush.

"That is perfectly true," I said, turning pale, but in a firmer tone, trying to convince myself that I was speaking the truth. "Surely everything in the world passes away. As for my terrible guilt towards you, I am sure that it long ago became a matter of indifference to you, and much more understandable, more forgivable than before; my guilt was not entirely my own choice, and even then I deserved some indulgence because of my extreme youth and of that amazing web of circumstances in which I was entangled. Besides, I've already been punished enough for my guilt—by my own ruin."

"By your ruin?"

"Isn't that the right word for it? Even now you don't understand me, don't know me, as you said then?"

She was silent, then she said:

"I saw you at the ball in Voronezh. . . . How young I was then and how surprisingly unhappy! Though can there be such a thing as unhappy love?" she asked, raising her head with a questioning movement of her eyes and eye-lashes. "Does not the saddest music in the world give happiness? But tell me about yourself; can it be that you have settled down permanently in the country?"

With an effort I asked her:

"Does that mean you still loved me then?"

"Yes."

I fell silent, feeling that my face was beginning to burn.

"Is it true what I heard. . . that you are in love, and have a child?"

"It is not love," I answered. "A painful pity, affection, nothing more."

"Tell me about it."

And I told her everything—up to the point where Gasha advised me to "Go away and live as I liked". I ended by saying:

"So now you see I'm completely ruined in every way. . . ."

"Nonsense," she said, keeping her thoughts to herself. "Your whole life is in front of you. But of course marriage, for you, is impossible. Obviously she is one of those women who is less sorry for the child than for herself."

"It's not a question of marriage," I said. "My God! How could I marry!"

She looked at me reflectively.

"Yes, yes. And how strange it is. Your prophecy came true—we became relations. Do you feel you are really my cousin now?" And putting her hand on mine, she said:

"But you are terribly tired from the journey, and you haven't even touched any food. You don't look well; that's enough talk for today; go now; the bed in the pavilion is made up for you. . . ."

I humbly kissed her hand; she called the maid, who accompanied me with a lamp, though it was light

enough from the low moon, and led me first down the main avenue, then down a path to the side through the spacious park, to that ancient rotunda with wooden columns. And I sat by the open window, in an arm-chair alongside the bed; I began to smoke and I thought; I made this sudden stupid step in vain, I came here to no purpose, relying on my composure, on my strength of will. . . . The night was extraordinarily still, it was late. Probably a little rain fell—the air became still warmer and softer. And in a wonderful harmony with that motionless warmth and stillness the first cocks started to crow slowly and cautiously in the distance from various parts of the village. The bright circle of the moon opposite the rotunda seemed to fade away, to mingle its light expectantly with the shadows of the distant wood and of the near-by spreading apple-trees. Where the light penetrated, I could see brilliant crystal-clear patches; the shade was dappled and mysterious. . . . And she, dressed in something long, dark and shining, came up to the window, just as mysteriously and inaudibly. . . .

Later on the moon shone over the garden again and looked right inside the rotunda, and we talked to each other—she sitting on the bed, I, kneeling beside it, and holding her hand:

"On that terrible night of the thunderstorm I already loved only you; I knew no other passion then except the most enraptured pure passion for you."

"Yes, in course of time I understood it all. And yet when I suddenly remembered that thunderstorm immediately after my memory of what had happened only an hour before in the avenue. . ."

"Nowhere in the world is there anyone like you.

When I looked just now at your green silk dress and at your knees under it, I felt I would give my life to touch it with my lips, merely to touch it."

"Did you never forget me in all these years?"

"I only forgot in the same way as one forgets how to live, how to breathe. You said rightly; love cannot be unhappy. Ah, your orange-coloured nightdress, and your whole look, when I caught my first glimpse of your girlish figure, that first morning of my love for you! Then your arm in the sleeve of that Ukrainian blouse, the way you bowed your head when you were reading *The Precipice,* and I muttered 'Natalya, Natalya!' "

"Yes, yes."

"And then at the ball—how tall and terrifying you were in your womanly beauty—how I wanted to die that night at the climax of my love and my despair! The next time I saw you with a candle in your hand, so innocent in your deep mourning. It seemed to me that the candle which lit up your face had become something sacred."

"And now you are with me again forever. But we shall rarely see each other—how could I, your spiritual wife, become your mistress in the eyes of the world?"

In December she died in Geneva after premature childbirth.

# MISS KLARA

The Georgian Irakly Meladze, son of a rich merchant in Vladikavkaz, travelled to Petersburg in January on his father's business, and dined one evening at Palkin's restaurant. As always, and for no particular reason, he looked decidedly gloomy; he was short, slightly hunched, lean and strong, with thick reddish hair growing over a low forehead almost to his eyebrows; his face was clean-shaven and the colour of dark brick; he had a nose like a scimitar, sunken brown eyes, scraggy arms, small hairy wrists, and sharp strong round finger-nails; he was dressed in a blue suit cut in an over-fashionable provincial style and in a blue silk shirt with a long tie shot with gold and pearl-grey tones. He was dining in the large crowded room to the strains of a loud string orchestra, elated by the feeling that he was in the capital, in the centre of its luxurious winter life—beyond the windows shone the evening lights of the Nevsky; heavy snow-flakes, mauve in the light of the street-lamps, fell over the thick uninterrupted stream of tram-cars, dashing carriages and cabs. He drank two glasses of orange brandy, took a few bites of fat smoked eel, intently ate his juicy *hors d'œuvres*, but kept on looking at a massive brunette dining at a little table nearby, and who seemed to him the very height of beauty and elegance; a full figure, high breasts and broad hips—all tightly drawn together in a black satin dress; she wore an ermine cape over her broad shoulders and an exquisitely shaped black

hat over her dark hair; her black eyes with curly stuck-on eyelashes had a masterful independent look, her thin orange-tinted lips were proudly pursed; her plump face was white as chalk from powder. . . . Gulping down his capercailzie with sour cream, Meladze nodded his head and with a hooked finger beckoned the waiter over to him, pointing at her with his eyes.

"Tell me, please, who is she?"

The waiter winked:

"Miss Klara."

"Please let me have the bill quickly. . . ."

She had also just paid her bill, after gracefully drinking a little cup of coffee with milk; when she had paid and carefully counted the change, she slowly rose and moved with gliding steps towards the ladies' room. He followed her out, ran down the worn red carpet of the staircase to the entrance porch, hurriedly put on his overcoat by the porter's lodge and stood waiting for her at the entrance under the thickly falling snow. Soon she came out, holding her head majestically erect, wearing a loose sealskin coat and with her hands tucked inside a large ermine muff. He barred her way, and, with a bow, took off his astrakhan hat:

"Please allow me to accompany you. . . ."

She stopped and looked at him with a worldly air of surprise.

"It is rather naïve of you to make such a suggestion to a lady you do not know."

He put on his hat and muttered in an offended tone:

"Why naïve? We might have gone to the theatre and afterwards drank champagne. . . ."

She shrugged her shoulders:

"What insistence! Obviously you have just arrived from

the provinces."

He made haste to say that he had come from Valdikavkaz, that he and his father ran a large business there. . . .

"So you do business by day but feel bored and lonely in the evening?"

"Terribly bored!"

As if something had suddenly occurred to her, she remarked with assumed nonchalance:

"Very well then, let us be bored together. If you like, you can come to my place, you will find champagne there too. And afterwards we will go and have supper on one of the islands. But you can't expect to do all that on the cheap."

"How much will it cost?"

"Fifty roubles at my place. But of course on the islands you'll have to spend more than fifty."

He grinned squeamishly.

"All right. That's not the question!"

The coachman, plastered with snow, who kept on smacking his lips in time with the horse's rhythmic knock against the shafts of the sleigh, quickly drove them to the Ligovka and stopped in front of a five-storied house. On the fifth floor the faintly-lit staircase came to an end opposite the single door of an isolated flat. On the way both of them hardly spoke—at first he shouted excitedly, boasting about Vladikavkaz and how he was staying in the Northern Hotel in the most expensive room, on the first floor; then he abruptly fell silent, holding her by her wet fur coat either round the waist or round her broad behind; he already tormented himself, thinking only of one thing: she covered her face from the snow with her muff. They mounted the staircase in silence. She

slowly opened the door with a small English latch-key, turned on the electric light in the flat, took off her coat and hat, shaking the snow from them; he noticed how her thick hair with its almost crimson tint was brushed smoothly back from a straight parting. Controlling his impatience and irritation at her slowness, and feeling how hot, stuffy and dull it was in this isolated flat, he still tried to be amiable and remarked:

"How cosy it is here!"

She answered in a casual tone:

"But rather cramped. Every convenience, a gas-stove in the kitchen, an excellent bathroom, but only two proper rooms, the sitting-room and the bedroom. . . ."

The sitting-room had a large thick carpet, an old sofa and plush curtains hanging over the doors and windows; on a high stand a lamp was burning brightly under a curved pink lamp-shade; in the bedroom, which adjoined the sitting-room, the rosy light of a little lamp on the night-table was also visible through the door. She passed through, placing for him a mother-of-pearl ash-tray on the sofa table, which was covered with a velvet cloth; she stayed shut up in the bedroom for a long time. He looked more and more grim, as he sat smoking in the arm-chair by the table, squinting at the "Winter Sunset" by Klever, which hung over the sofa, and at the large portrait on the other wall, of an officer with side-whiskers and a military cloak thrown over his shoulders. At last the door from the bedroom opened:

"Well, let us sit down now and have a chat," she said, emerging in a black dressing-gown embroidered with golden dragons and with backless satin slippers on her bare feet.

He cast a greedy look at her naked heels, like white

turnips; she laughed, understanding his look, went into the hall for a minute and re-appeared with a bowl of pears in one hand and an open bottle of champagne in the other. "My favourite, the pink kind," she said, and went out again; she brought back two glasses, filled them to the brim with the slightly foaming pink wine, clinked glasses with him, drank a little and sat down on his knees, picking out of the bowl the yellowest pear and immediately biting into it. The wine was warm, with a sickly sweetness, but in his excitement he drank it to the last drop and abruptly kissed her plump neck with his wet lips. She covered his mouth with her large palm, perfumed with *Chypre*:

"Only without kisses. We're not students. And put your money here, on the table."

Pulling out a note-case from his inner coat-pocket and a watch from his waistcoat, she laid them both on the table and finishing the pear she moved her legs apart. He grew bolder and pulled open the dragon-embroidered dressing-gown to disclose her large full-breasted white body with thick black hair growing under the broad folds of her stomach. "She's old already," he thought, glancing at the large pores of her chalk-white thickly powdered face, at her cracked orange-coloured lips, at her terrible stuck-on eyelashes, and the grey parting which streaked the middle of her smooth black hair, but he was already quite intoxicated by the size and whiteness of that naked body, by the round breasts whose red tips were somehow very small, and by the soft buttocks pressing heavily on his knees. She slapped him hard over the hand and stood up, her nostrils quivering:

"Impatient, like a schoolboy," she exclaimed angrily.

"We'll drink another glass and then we can go. . . ."

And she proudly raised the bottle. But he with blood-shot eyes rushed at her with all his weight and knocked her over on the carpet. She dropped the bottle, and screwing up her eyes smacked him violently in the face. He grunted softly, bent his head to protect it from another blow, then threw himself down on her, seizing her naked buttocks with one hand, and quickly unbuttoning his clothes with the other. She dug her teeth into his neck, and, lifting back her right knee, dealt him such a terrific blow in the stomach that he was hurled under the table, but immediately he jumped out, picked up the bottle from the floor and shattered it on top of her half-raised head. She gulped, fell backwards, her arms falling limp, and her mouth wide open—blood gushed from it in a thick stream. He seized his watch and note-case and ran out through the hall.

By midnight he was seated in the post train, at ten o'clock in the morning he was already in Moscow, and at one o'clock he was sitting in the Rostov train in the station at Ryazan. At seven o'clock in the evening of the following day, he was arrested in the station buffet at Rostov.

# IN PARIS

When he was wearing a hat—walking along a street or standing up in a compartment on the underground—one could not even notice that his closely-cropped reddish hair was thickly flecked with silver-grey; and judging by the freshness of his thin clean-shaven face, by the erect bearing of his tall thin figure in the long waterproof coat, which he wore both in summer and winter, one would not have thought he was more than forty years old. But a dry sadness showed in the expression of his bright eyes, and he spoke and behaved like a man who had been through a lot in life. At one time he had rented a farm in Provence, where he had picked up plenty of pungent Provençal jokes, which in Paris he sometimes enjoyed repeating with a smile, but in his habitually calm restrained voice. Many people knew that his wife had abandoned him in Constantinople, and that he had lived since then with an unhealed wound in his heart. He never disclosed to anyone the story of this wound—but sometimes involuntarily dropped hints about it—casually joking if the conversation touched on women:

"*Rien n'est plus difficile que de reconnaître un bon melon et une femme de bien.*"

One day—it was a wet evening in the late Paris autumn, he went to dine in a small Russian restaurant in one of the dark side-streets near the Rue de Passy. In front of it stood something like a *Delikatessen* shop—he happened to stop in front of its broad window, through which

he could see on the window-sill rose-coloured cone-shaped bottles of mountain-ash vodka, square yellow liqueur bottles, a dish with dry fried *pirojki*, another dish with minced cutlets turned rather grey, a box of *halva*, a box of sprats, further away a counter spread with *hors d'œuvres*, and behind the counter stood the proprietor, a woman with a rather surly Russian face. The shop was lit up and the light drew him from the dark street with its damp and greasy pavement. He came in, bowed to the proprietor, and went through into a still empty dimly-lit room, adjoining the shop; it glistened with little tables covered with white paper cloths. There he slowly arranged his grey hat and long coat on a projecting hanger, sat down at a table in the furthest corner, and absent-mindedly rubbing his hands started to read the long list of *hors d'œuvres* and dishes, partly printed and partly written in dim purple ink on a soiled sheet of paper. Suddenly his corner lit up, and he saw approaching him a calm polite woman about thirty years old, with smooth black hair parted in the centre and with black eyes; she was wearing an embroidered white apron over her black dress.

"*Bon soir, Monsieur*," she said in a pleasant voice.

She seemed to him so attractive that he felt embarrassed and answered awkwardly:

"*Bon soir*. . . . but surely you are Russian?"

"Yes. Excuse me, it has become a habit to speak to the clients in French."

"But do you get many French people coming here?"

"Quite a lot, and they always ask at once for vodka, pancakes, even for *borshch.* Have you already chosen something?"

"No, there is so much of everything here. . . please

advise me yourself."

She began to pick out the dishes with a knowledgeable air.

"We have ready now sorrel soup in naval style, Cossack beef-cutlets. . . you can have beaten-out veal, or if you prefer, grilled mutton *à la Kars*. . . ."

"Excellent. Kindly let me have sorrel soup and beef cutlets."

She raised the paper pad which hung from her belt and wrote on it with a pencil stump. Her hands were very white and well-shaped, her dress was much worn but one could see it had come from a good shop.

"Do you want some vodka?"

"Yes, please. It's horribly damp out of doors."

"What would you like as *hors d'œuvres*? There is excellent Danube herring, some fairly fresh red caviar, pickled cucumbers, not too salt. . . ."

He looked at her again; the white embroidered apron on the black dress was very charming; she had the firm breasts of a young woman. . . her full lips were freshly coloured, not painted, a black pigtail was twisted round the back of her head, but the skin of her white hands was well cared-for, her nails were shining, slightly rosy—evidently she used manicure. . . .

"What shall I order?" he asked with a smile.

"If you agree, just a salt herring with a hot potato. And what wine will you order?"

"Red—ordinary wine—the same as you always serve at table."

She made a note on her pad and brought over to him from the next table a carafe with water. He shook his head:

"No, thank you, I never drink water, or wine with

water. *L'eau gâte le vin comme la charette le chemin et la femme—l'âme.*"

"You have a high opinion of us!" she answered unconcernedly and went off to fetch the vodka and salt herring. He followed her with his eyes—how smoothly she walked, her black dress quivering as she moved. . . . Yes, she was polite and indifferent, she had all the habits of a modest and worthy secretary. But where did her good expensive shoes come from? There must be an elderly wealthy "*ami*". . . . He had not felt so animated for a long time—thanks to her—and that last thought roused in him a concealed irritation. Yes, from year to year, from day to day, one quietly waits for a single thing—a happy love encounter, one lives solely on the hope of such a meeting—and then it turns out to be in vain. . . .

On the next day he came again and sat at the same table. She was busy at first, taking the orders of two Frenchmen, repeating aloud as she wrote on her pad.

"*Caviar rouge, salade russe. . . deux chachlyks. . . .*"

Then she went out, returned and approached him with a slight smile, as to a person one knows.

"Good evening. It's nice to know that you like our place."

He drew himself up cheerfully.

"Good health to you. Yes, I like the place very much. What should I call you?"

"Olga Alexandrovna. And you, may I ask?"

"Nikolay Platonich."

They shook hands, and she raised her pad.

"Today we have wonderful kidney soup with cucumbers. We have a remarkable cook, he worked on the

yacht of the Grand Duke Alexander Mikhailovich."

"Excellent, the soup by all means. . . but have you been working here long?"

"This is my third month."

"And where did you work before that?"

"I was a saleswoman in the Printemps."

"I suppose you lost your job because they were cutting down the staff."

"Yes, I wouldn't have left of my own accord."

He thought with some satisfaction: "That means there's no question of an '*ami*,' " and he asked: "Are you married?"

"Yes."

"And what does your husband do?"

"He is working in Jugoslavia. He took part in the White resistance movement. So did you, I suppose?"

"Yes, I took part both in the Great War and in the Civil War."

"One can see that at once. And probably you were a general," she said, smiling.

"Formerly I was. Now I am writing some historical accounts of those wars commissioned by various foreign publishers. . . . How is it you are alone?"

"I'm just alone."

On the third evening he asked:

"Are you fond of the cinema?"

She answered as she put down on the table the bowl with *borshch*:

"Sometimes it's interesting."

"They say there is a remarkable film showing now at the Etoile Cinema. Would you like to go and see it? Of course you have some evenings off?"

"*Merci*. I am free on Mondays."

"Well, then let us go next Monday. Today is Saturday. So that means the day after tomorrow. Is that all right?

"All right. Tomorrow I suppose you won't come here?"

"No, I'm going outside Paris, to see some friends. But why do you ask?"

"I don't know . . . it's strange, but I've somehow grown accustomed to you."

He gave her a grateful glance and blushed.

"And I to you. You know there are so few happy meetings in the world . . ." and he hastened to change the subject:

"So, the day after tomorrow. Where shall we meet? Where do you live?"

"Near the Métro Motte-Piquet."

"You see, how convenient—a direct line to the Etoile. I will wait for you there at the métro exit at exactly half-past seven."

"*Merci.*"

He jokingly bowed to her.

"*C'est moi qui vous remercie.* Put the children to bed." he said with a smile, wanting to find out whether she had any children—"and come along."

"Thank God, I have none," she answered and glided away carrying the plates.

He felt both moved and gloomy as he walked home. "I've grown accustomed to you. . . ." Yes, perhaps this is really the long-awaited happy meeting. Only how late it had come. *Le bon Dieu envoie toujours des culottes à ceux qui n'ont pas de derrière. . . .*"

On Monday evening it was raining, the heavy sky over Paris turned a hazy red. Hoping to have supper with her in Montparnasse, he did not dine, went into a

café on the Chaussée de la Muette, ate a ham sandwich, drank a glass of beer, lit a cigarette and got into a taxi. At the entrance to the Métro Etoile he stopped the chauffeur, got out and stood on the pavement in the rain—the fat red-cheeked chauffeur waited confidently. A hot draught blew up from the métro stairs, people in thick black groups poured out, opening their umbrellas as they walked, a news-boy, quacking like a duck, kept on calling out the names of the evening papers. Suddenly she emerged from the crowd. He joyfully moved forward to meet her.

"Olga Alexandrovna. . ."

Smartly and fashionably dressed, she looked him in the face with her black eyes—not a constrained look, as in the restaurant—she freely held out her hand, with an umbrella hanging over her arm, and with the other hand she smoothed the folds of her long dress—this delighted him still more; that evening dress meant that she had also thought they might go and sup somewhere after the cinema—he raised the corner of her glove and kissed her white wrist.

"Poor man, were you waiting long?"

"No, I only just arrived. Let us get into the taxi quickly. . . ."

And with a sense of excitement he had not experienced for a long time he followed her into the half-dark interior, smelling of damp cloth. At a turn in the road the car swayed sharply, for a moment a lamp lit it up inside—he instinctively grasped her round the waist, smelt the powder on her cheeks, noticed her strong knees under the black dress, the glitter of her black eyes and the fullness of her red-tinted lips; a completely different woman was sitting beside him.

In the dark hall, as they watched the brightly illuminated screen, across which roaring, droning aeroplanes flew obliquely and fell through clouds, they started to talk quietly:

"Do you live alone or with some woman friend?"

"Alone. It's really horrible. A clean little hotel and warm, but you know, one of those where any man can bring in a girl for the night or for a few hours. . . . My room is on the sixth floor—no lift of course—at the fourth floor the red carpet on the staircase comes to an end. . . . At night, in the rain, one feels awful. One opens the window—not a soul anywhere, an utterly dead town. Somewhere far underneath a street lamp burns in the rain. . . . And you, of course, are a bachelor; do you also live in an hotel?"

"I have a little flat in Passy. I also live alone there. I'm an old Parisian. At one time I lived in Provence, rented a farm, wanted to get away from everyone and everything, to live by the labour of my own hands—but the strain was too much for me. I hired a Cossack to help me—he turned out to be a drunkard, he was a harsh creature, dangerous when he was drunk; I reared chickens and rabbits—they kept on dying, a mule nearly bit me to death one day—they're very vindictive and intelligent animals . . . but more than anything else, complete loneliness. My wife abandoned me in Constantinople."

"Are you joking?"

"Not at all. It's a very ordinary story. *Qui se marie par amour a bonnes nuits et mauvais jours.* And I had little enough of either. She left me in the second year of our marriage."

"Where is she now?"

"I don't know. . . ."

She remained silent for a long time. On the screen some imitator of Chaplin rushed crazily around with his feet turned out in huge torn slippers, wearing a bowler-hat on one side.

"Well, you must feel very lonely," she said.

"Yes; but what of that, one must be patient. *Patience, médecine des pauvres.*"

"A sorrowful medicine."

"Yes, not exactly a cheerful one. So much so," he went on with a smile, "that sometimes I have looked through the *Russian Illustrated*—in that section, you know, where they print some kind of marriage and personal announcements—'Russian girl from Latvia leads dull life, would like to enter into correspondence with sensitive Russian Parisian, and asks him to send at same time postcard photograph. . . .' 'Serious brown-haired lady, not fashionable type, but sympathetic, widowed with nine-year-old son, would like to correspond for serious purpose with sober gentleman not younger than forty, who has material security of chauffeur's job or some other kind of work, and loves family cosiness. Intelligence not obligatory. . . .' I fully understand her—not obligatory."

"But have you no friends, no acquaintances?"

"Friends, no. And acquaintance is a poor comfort."

"Who then looks after your household affairs?"

"My household is modest. I make my own coffee and prepare my own lunch. A *femme de ménage* comes in the evening."

"Poor man," she said, pressing his hand.

And they sat thus for a long time, hand in hand, united by the darkness and their closeness to each other, giving

the impression that they were watching the screen, to which a smoky chalk-like strip of light descended over their heads from the little cabin on the back wall. Chaplin's imitator, whose battered bowler-hat had fallen from his head in horror, was driving madly towards a telegraph-post in the relics of an antediluvian motorcar with a tall steaming spout on the bonnet. The loud-speaker yelled musically in several different voices, and, from below, from the hall laden with cigarette-smoke—they were sitting on the balcony—there mingled with the applause resounding bursts of hearty laughter. He leaned towards her.

"Do you know? Let us go somewhere on Montparnasse; it's very boring here, and there's nothing to breathe. . . ."

She nodded her head and began to put on her gloves.

Sitting again in the half-dark taxi looking at the windows streaked with rain, which now and then glistened like multi-coloured diamonds from the light of the street lamps among blood-coloured or silvery advertisements, he again raised the corner of her glove and imprinted a prolonged kiss on her hand. She looked at him, her eyes staring strangely from under her coal-black eyelashes, and sadly, tenderly moved her face towards him; her full lips had a sweet perfumed taste.

In the Café Coupole they began with oysters and *vin d'Anjou*, then they ordered partridges and red claret. By the time they were sipping coffee with yellow chartreuse the wine had gone to their heads. They smoked a lot, the ash-tray was full of reddened ends from her cigarettes. While they were talking he looked at her heated face and thought that she was really beautiful.

"But tell me the truth," she said, pinching off the tip of her tongue a speck of tobacco—"you surely had

encounters during these years?"

"Yes. But you can imagine of what kind. One night in an hotel. . . . And you?"

She was silent.

"There was one, a very painful story. . . . No, I don't want to speak about it. A boy, really a *souteneur*. . . . But how did you separate from your wife?"

"Shamefully. He was also a mere boy, a handsome young Greek, and extremely rich. And within two months there was not a trace left of the pure touching girl who had simply prayed on her knees for the White Army and for all of us. She began to go out and dine with him in the most expensive night club in Pera; she received from him gigantic baskets of flowers. . . . 'I don't understand how you can be jealous of him. You are busy the whole day. I have an amusing time with him, he is simply a nice boy for me and nothing more. . . .' A nice boy! And she herself was only twenty. It was difficult to forget her—as she used to be."

When they brought the bill, she looked through it carefully and would not let him give more than a ten per cent tip to the waiter. After that it seemed to them still stranger to part company in half an hour.

"Let us go to my flat," he said sadly. "We can sit and talk a little longer. . . ."

"Yes, yes," she answered, standing up, taking him by the arm and pressing it to her.

The chauffeur, a Russian, drove them to the lonely little side-street, stopping at the entrance of a tall house, near which, under the metallic light of a gas-lamp, the rain was trickling on to a tin can with garbage. They entered the vestibule, and went slowly up in the narrow lift, embracing and quietly kissing each other. He

managed to fit the key in the lock of his door before the electric light went out, and led her into the hall, and from there into the little dining-room, where only one bulb in the chandelier burned dimly. Their faces looked already tired. He suggested they should drink some wine.

"No, my dear," she said. "I can't drink any more."

He pressed her:

"Just one glass of white wine. I have an excellent *Pouilly* standing on the window-sill."

"You drink, my dear, but I shall go and undress and wash—and then to sleep, sleep. We are not children. You must have known very well that once I agreed to come here with you . . . and indeed, why should we leave each other?"

In his excitement he could make no answer; silently he led her into the bedroom, switched on for her the light in the bathroom, the door of which was open from the bedroom. There the little bulbs burned brightly; it was warm from the heating, while the rain pattered evenly on the roof. She began at once to pull off her long dress over her head.

He went out, drank straight off two glasses of icy dry white wine, and, unable to restrain himself, went back to the bedroom. The lit-up bathroom was vividly reflected in the big mirror on the opposite wall in the bedroom. She was standing with her back to him, naked, white and strong, leaning over the wash-basin, washing her neck and breasts.

"You can't come in!" she said, but throwing over herself a dressing-gown, which hardly covered her glistening breasts, her strong white stomach, her tight thighs, she came forward and embraced him like a wife. He too embraced her like a wife, kissing her still damp breasts,

her cool body smelling of toilet soap, her eyes and lips, from which she had washed away the make-up. . . .

On the following day she left her work and came to live with him. One day during the winter he persuaded her to rent a safe in the Crédit Lyonnais bank in her name and to put in it everything they had earned:

"Precautions never do any harm," he said. "Love makes donkeys dance, and I feel exactly as if I were twenty. But no one can tell what may happen. . . ."

On the third day after Easter he died in a carriage of the underground—reading the newspaper—his head suddenly fell back on the seat, his eyes closed. . . .

When she, dressed in black, returned from the cemetery, it was a mild spring day, spring clouds were floating over the soft Paris sky, everything spoke of a new and lasting life—but for her it was all finished.

She started to put the flat in order. In the passage, hanging on a peg, she saw his old summer overcoat, grey with a red lining. She took it down, pressed it to her face, and as she pressed it she sank down on the floor, her whole body convulsed by sobs, weeping, praying to someone for mercy.

# MUSA

Though I was no longer in the first flush of youth, I one day decided I must learn the art of painting—I always had a passion for it—so I left my estate in the Tambov district and settled for the winter in Moscow; I took lessons from a fairly well-known artist without any talent, a slovenly fat man, who showed a remarkable faculty for turning everything to his own advantage; he had long hair, brushed back in thick greasy curls, a pipe between his teeth, a short red velvet jacket, dirty-grey gaiters over his shoes—for them I felt a special loathing—casual manners and a condescending way of inspecting with screwed-up eyes the work of a pupil and murmuring as if to himself:

"Interesting, interesting. . . . a sure success . . ."

I lived on the Arbat, next to the Prague Restaurant, in the Metropolitan Hotel. By day I worked with the artist and I often spent the evenings in cheap restaurants with various new Bohemian acquaintances, young and shabby ones, but all with an equal partiality for playing billiards and for consuming crayfish with beer . . . it was really an unpleasant and boring life! That effeminate dirty artist, his neglected 'arty' studio strewn with all kinds of dusty odds and ends, that gloomy 'Metropolitan'. . . . How clearly I remember; the snow always piled up under the windows, the dull thundering of the horse trams along the Arbat, in the evening the sour smell of beer and gas in the dimly-lit restaurant . . . I cannot

conceive why I led such a dreary existence—I was far from poor at that time.

However, one day in March I was sitting at home, working with crayons; a no longer wintry dampness from wet snow and rain penetrated through the upper opening of the double windows, on the road the horses' hoofs rang with a different sound, and the trams rattled almost musically; suddenly someone knocked at my entrance door. I shouted: who is there?—but no answer came. I waited, called out again—silence ensued, but it was followed by another knock. I got up and opened the door; on the threshold stood a tall girl in a grey winter hat, a plain grey overcoat and grey snow boots; there was a determined look in her acorn-coloured eyes with long lashes; drops of rain and snow glistened on her face and hair under her hat; she stared at me and said:

"I am studying at the Conservatoire; my name is Musa Graf. I heard you are an interesting man and came here to meet you. You have no objection?"

Rather surprised, I muttered some amiable answer.

"I'm very flattered. You're welcome. Only I must warn you that those rumours you heard about me are hardly true; I don't think there's anything interesting about me."

"In any case, let me come in, don't keep me standing at the door," she said, still looking me straight in the face. "If you're flattered, then you can receive me."

And coming in, she started to take off her hat in front of my blackened, silvery-grey mirror, just as if she were at home, smoothed her auburn hair, threw off her coat, emerged in a checked flannel dress, sat down on the sofa, screwed up her nose, all wet with snow and rain, and commanded:

"Pull off my snow boots and give me the handkerchief

from my coat pocket."

I handed it to her, she wiped her face, stretched out her feet to me:

"I saw you yesterday at Shor's concert," she said indifferently.

Restraining a stupid smile of self-satisfaction and bewilderment—what an odd guest!—I meekly pulled off her boots one after the other. She still smelt of the fresh air she had brought in with her; it excited me; so did that mixture of daring with feminine youthfulness in her face, in her honest eyes and her large attractive hands—in everything that I saw and felt as I pulled the boots away from her skirt, under which I could see her firm round knees, her plump thighs in their thin grey stockings and the long soles of her feet in their open patent leather slippers.

Then she arranged herself comfortably on the sofa, evidently intending to stay for some time. Not knowing what to say, I began to ask her from whom and what she had heard about me, who she was, where and with whom she lived. She answered:

"From whom and what I heard about you, that's unimportant. I really came because I saw you at the concert. You are quite handsome. And I'm a doctor's daughter, I live not far from you on the Prechistensky boulevard."

She talked somewhat unexpectedly and abruptly. Again not knowing what to say, I asked:

"Do you want some tea?"

"Yes," she said. "And, if you have some money, send out to buy some rennet apples at Byelov's—close by on the Arbat. Only tell the man to hurry, I'm impatient."

"Yet you look so calm."

"Never mind how I look . . ."

When the servant brought in the samovar and a little bag of apples, she prepared tea, wiped the cups and spoons. . . . She ate an apple, drank a cup of tea, sank back on the sofa and tapped with her hand on the place beside her.

"Now come and sit with me."

I sat down, she embraced me, slowly kissed me on the lips, moved away again and looked at me as if she wanted to make sure that I was worthy of all this, then she closed her eyes and kissed me again—long and intensely.

"Well, there," she said, as if her mind were eased—"for the time being that's enough. Till the day after to-morrow."

It was already quite dark in the room—only a gloomy half-light came from the lamps in the street. What I felt can only be imagined! Whence this sudden happiness? She was so young and vigorous, her lips had extraordinary taste and form. . . . As if in a dream I heard the monotonous ring of the trams, the clatter of hoofs . . .

"I want to dine with you at the 'Prague' the day after to-morrow," she said. "I've never been there and I'm completely inexperienced. I can imagine what you take me for. But as a matter of fact you are my first love."

"Love?"

"What else can one call it?"

Of course I soon gave up my studies; she continued hers after a fashion. We hardly ever separated, lived like a newly-married couple, visited the picture galleries and exhibitions, heard concerts together and even went to some public lectures . . .

In May I went, as she wished, to live on an old estate near Moscow; a few small villas had been built there for letting; she came regularly to visit me there, returning

to Moscow at one o'clock in the morning. This was a complete novelty for me—a villa near Moscow; never before had I lived idly like this, a holiday-maker on an estate, so different to our estates on the great plains—and in such a climate.

It rained a lot; pine forests grew all around. From time to time white clouds piled up over a patch of blue sky, there came a distant roll of thunder, then glittering raindrops began to fall through the sunshine, quickly turned by the heat into pine-scented vapour . . . Everything was wet, greasy and translucent . . . the trees in the park were so huge that the villas strewn about there seemed tiny, insignificant, like huts among the trees of tropical countries. The lake lay spread out like an enormous black mirror; it was half covered with green duckweed . . . I lived on the edge of the park, in the forest. My log-built villa was not yet quite completed—the walls were still rough wood, the floors unpolished, the stoves had no doors, there was almost no furniture. And from the constant damp my long boots. lying under the bed, soon became covered with whiskers of green mould.

In the evenings it did not get dark before midnight; the twilight from the west lingered for hours among the motionless quiet trees. On moonlit nights this half-light mingled strangely with the moonlight, also motionless, as if bewitched. And that serene calm which reigned everywhere, that clear sky and air, gave promising signs that the rain was over. After driving her over to the station, I started to doze—when I suddenly heard thunderclaps and rain pattering down again on the roof, and the darkness around was broken by perpendicular streaks of lightning. . . . In the early morning the mauve earth

in the wet avenues was mottled with shade and dazzling patches of sunlight; the warbling of those birds called flycatchers mingled with the shrill song of the thrushes. By midday a haze had spread over the ground, clouds were gathering and drops of rain began to fall. Before sunset the air had cleared, a pale gold network of rays from the setting sun quivering through the foliage played over my rough log walls. I went to the station to meet her. The train came in, a stream of holiday-makers poured out on the platform, I smelt the coal dust from the engine breaking in on the damp freshness of the forest; through the crowd she came into view, carrying a net bag laden with parcels of refreshments, fruits, a bottle of Madeira. . . . We ate a friendly lunch tête-à-tête. Before her late departure we wandered through the park. She grew like a sleep-walker, moving forward with her head leaning on my shoulder. . . . The black lake, the age-old trees, disappearing in the starry sky . . . the clear enchanted night, infinite and still, with the endless long shadows of the trees lying over the silvery lake-like fields. . . .

In June she went away with me to my country estate—without marrying me; but she lived with me like a wife and began to look after the household. In this way she spent the long autumn without ever growing bored, absorbed in daily routine cares and reading a lot. Among our neighbours the one who visited us most often was a certain Zavistovsky, a poor lonely landowner, who lived two miles from us, a sickly, red-haired, timid and slow-witted man—but a passable musician. In winter he began to come to see us almost every evening. I had known him since childhood, and had grown by now so used to him that an evening without his company seemed

strange. We played chess together or he played duets with her on the piano.

Before Christmas I had to make an expedition to the town. It was moonlight when I returned. Entering the house, I could not find her anywhere. I sat down alone in front of the samovar.

"Where is the mistress, Dunya? Did she go out for a walk?"

"I don't know. She hasn't been at home since breakfast. She dressed and went out," said my old nurse severely, as she walked across the dining-room without raising her head.

"Probably she went to see Zavistovsky," I thought. "Most likely she'll soon come back with him—it's already seven o'clock." I went and lay down in my study and immediately fell asleep—the whole day I had been freezing in the sleigh on the roads. I woke up just as suddenly within an hour—distinctly and wildly thinking, "Surely she has thrown me over! She must have hired some peasant in the village, driven to the station, and so to Moscow—from her one must expect anything. But perhaps she has come back?" I went through the house—no, she had not come back. I felt ashamed in front of the servants . . .

At ten o'clock, not knowing what to do, I put on my short fur-coat, for some reason took my shotgun, and walked along the highroad to Zavistovsky's place, thinking: "Strange coincidence that just today he too never came, and I have a whole ghastly night in front of me! Can she really have run away and left me? No, it cannot be!" As I walked I crunched over the tracks of trodden snow; on the left the snow-covered fields shone under the pale low moon . . . I turned off the high

road and entered Zavistovsky's wretched estate; an avenue of bare trees led to it through the fields, then came the entrance to the courtyard, on the left stood the crumbling old house; it was dark inside . . . I mounted the ice-covered steps, opened with an effort the heavy door with its tattered upholstery inside—in the hall an open stove was burning redly, it was warm and dark . . . it was also dark in the sitting-room.

"Vikenty Vikentich!"

Noiselessly, in felt boots, he appeared on the threshhold of the study, which was lit up by the moon through a triple window:

"Ah, it's you. . . . Come in, come in, please. . . . As you see I'm whiling away the evening in darkness without a fire. . . ."

I went in and sat down on the uneven sofa.

"Just imagine, Musa has disappeared somewhere. . . ."

He remained silent. Then, almost inaudibly, he murmured:

"Yes, yes; I understand you . . ."

"What is it, what do you understand?"

And suddenly, also without a sound, also in felt boots with a shawl thrown over her shoulders, Musa emerged from the bedroom adjoining the study.

"You've brought a gun," she said. "If you want to shoot, then shoot me, not him."

And she sat down on the other sofa opposite.

I looked at her felt boots, at her knees under the grey skirt—everything was clearly visible in the light falling from the window—I wanted to shout: "It would be better for you to kill me, I can't live without you; if only for your knees, for your skirt, for your little boots, I'm ready to give my whole life!"

"It's all over, that's clear enough," she said. "Scenes are useless."

"What a monster of cruelty you are!" I articulated with difficulty.

"Give me a cigarette," she said to Zavistovsky.

He timidly stretched himself towards her, held out his cigarette-case and started to fumble in his pocket for matches. . . .

"You talk to me like that," I said, panting for breath, "you might at least reduce your intimacy with him in my presence."

"Why should I?" she asked, raising her eyebrows, holding her cigarette in the air.

Something stabbed my heart and almost choked me, the blood throbbed in my temples. I got up and walked unsteadily away.

# THE STEAMER *SARATOV*

A light April shower rustled in the darkness against the windows. The pock-marked batman, drinking tea in the kitchen by the light of a tin lamp, looked at the clock which ticked on the wall, stood up and, with awkward efforts to stop his new boots from creaking, walked into the study and approached the sofa:

"It's ten o'clock, your honour. . . ."

He opened his eyes in alarm:

"What, ten o'clock? It can't be. . . ."

Both windows were open on to the gardens fringing the street—the air coming through them was scented with fresh spring dampness and the smell of poplars. With that keen sense of smell which comes after deep youthful sleep, he distinguished these scents and briskly threw his legs over the edge of the sofa:

"Light the lamp and send for a cab at once. Find a driver with a mettlesome horse. . . ."

And he dressed, washed himself, splashed his face with cold water, dabbed himself with eau-de-Cologne and combed his short curly hair, glancing again into the mirror; his face was fresh and his eyes shone. From one till six he had been lunching at a large officers' party, and on coming home he had fallen asleep in that sudden way in which people fall asleep after several hours of uninterrupted drinking, smoking, laughter and talk; but now he felt in fine form. The batman handed him his sword, his cap and a light summer overcoat, and

threw open the door into the porch—he jumped nimbly into the cab and called out rather hoarsely:

"Get a move on and I'll pay you an extra rouble!"

The clear lamplight shone against the thick succulent foliage of the trees, the scent of wet poplars was both fresh and aromatic, the horse trotted briskly, throwing up red sparks under his hoofs. Everything seemed beautiful; the leaves, the street-lamps, the approaching rendezvous, and the taste of the cigarette which he managed to smoke on the way. And everything merged into one—into the same happy sensation of being ready for absolutely anything. Was it the result of vodka, benedictine, Turkish coffee? Nonsense, it was simply spring and everything was wonderful. . .!

The door was opened by a small very vicious-looking maid in thin wobbling high-heeled shoes. Quickly slipping off his coat and unbuttoning his sword, throwing his cap on to the mirror-stand and slightly smoothing back his hair, he walked with clinking spurs into a small room, cramped by an excess of boudoir furniture. She too came in at once, swaying on backless high-heeled shoes, with bare feet which showed her pink heels—tall and willowy like a grey snake, in a tight-fitting checked housecoat with sleeves open up to the shoulder. Her slightly slanting eyes were also long. Between her long pale fingers she held a lighted cigarette in a long amber holder.

Kissing her left hand, he clicked his heels together:

"For God's sake, forgive me, I was detained through no fault of my own. . . ."

She looked down from her full height at the damp gloss on his short curly hair, at his shining eyes, noticed that his breath smelt of alcohol:

"Wine is an old familiar reason. . . ."

And she sat down on the silk *pouf*, putting her left hand over her right elbow, holding her cigarette high in the air, folding one leg over the other so that the slit side of her housecoat opened up right over the knee. He sat down opposite her on a silk-covered sofa, taking a cigarette-case out of his trouser-pocket:

"You understand how these things happen. . . ."

"I understand, I understand. . . ."

With a quick graceful movement he lit a cigarette, flourished the lighted match and threw it into the ash-tray on the little oriental table near the *pouf*; he sat back more comfortably and looked with his habitual unbounded admiration at her bare knee showing through the slit of her housecoat:

"Well, never mind, if you don't want to listen, you needn't. . . . What is our programme for tonight? Do you want to go to the Merchants' Garden? They are showing there now a kind of 'Japanese night', you know, with little lanterns, and geishas on the stage, 'I won first prize for beauty'. . ."

She shook her head.

"No programmes for me. I shall sit at home."

"As you like. That's not a bad idea, either."

She moved her eyes across the room.

"My dear, this is our last meeting."

He showed an amused surprise.

"How can it be the last?"

"It is."

His eyes twinkled even more gaily:

"Excuse me, please, but that is funny!"

"I'm not in the least amused."

"Very well. But all the same it would be interesting to

know 'what does that dream mean?'—as our sergeant says."

"What your sergeants say hardly interests me. And to tell you the truth I don't quite understand why you are so gay."

"I am gay as I always am when I see you."

"That's very nice but this time not quite appropriate."

"But damn it all, I don't understand anything! What has happened?"

"Something has happened about which I should have told you long ago. I am returning to him. Our separation was a mistake."

"My goodness! Are you serious?"

"Entirely serious. I was criminally guilty, but he is ready to forgive and forget everything."

"What—what generosity!"

"Don't behave like a clown. I saw him again during Lent. . . ."

"You mean to say—without telling me and continuing. . ."

"Continuing what? I understand, but never mind. . . . I met him—and of course without telling you, not wanting to upset you—and then I understood that I had never stopped loving him."

He screwed up his eyes, biting his cigarette-holder:

"You mean his money?"

"He's no richer than you. And what is your money to me. If I wanted I could . . ."

"Excuse me, only cocottes talk like that."

"And what am I, if not a cocotte? Do I live on my own money, and not on yours?"

He muttered in an officer's drawl:

"Money means nothing in love."

"But what if I love him?"

"So I, it seems, was only a temporary plaything, a recreation from moments of boredom, and one of your most profitable keepers?"

"You know perfectly well that there's no question of playthings or recreation. Well yes, I'm a kept woman, but it's mean to remind me of it."

"Don't twist so much! Choose your expressions carefully, as the French say!"

"I also advise you to stick to that rule. In a word . . ."

He stood up, felt within another surge of that readiness for anything, which seized him while he was rushing there in the cab, walked round the room collecting his thoughts, still unable to grasp that unexpected setback which had suddenly shattered all his joyful hopes for that evening, kicked away a yellow-haired doll in a red dress which was lying on the carpet, and sat down again on the sofa, looking at her defiantly:

"I ask you once more: are you only joking?"

Her eyelids fell and she made a negative gesture with her cigarette, which had long ago gone out.

He reflected for a moment, puffed at his cigarette, again biting the mouthpiece, and said, pausing between the words:

"Well, so you really think that I'll surrender to him like this those arms of yours, those legs, that he will kiss your knee which I kissed only yesterday?"

She raised her eyebrows:

"Surely I'm not just an object, my dear, which one can give away or keep. And what right have you . . ."

He quickly laid his cigarette down in an ash-tray, and bending sideways drew out of his hip-pocket a slippery, small but heavy Browning, moving it up and

down in his palm:

"Here is my right."

She squinted at him and laughed wearily:

"I am no lover of melodramas."

And, raising her voice, she called out in a casual tone:

"Sonya, give Pavel Sergeyevich his coat."

"What?"

"Nothing. You're drunk. Go away."

"Is that your last word?"

"It is."

And she got up, adjusting the slit in her dress. He walked up to her with gay determination:

"Better make sure that it isn't your very last!"

"You drunken actor!" she exclaimed contemptuously, and, smoothing her hair from behind with her long fingers, moved towards the door. He seized her so strongly by her bare forearm that she bent over, and turning round with even more squinting eyes, she tried to hit him. He nimbly moved aside and with a bitter smile pulled the trigger.

In December that same year the steamer *Saratov* of the volunteer fleet was sailing from the Indian Ocean to Vladivostock. Under a stuffy awning stretched over the forecastle in the motionless heat of the sultry half-light, lit up by limpid reflections from the water, convicts, naked to the waist, sat or lay along the deck, with fearful half-shaved heads, white canvas trousers and iron fetters round the ankles of their bare legs. He, like all the others, was naked to his waist, and his thin body was tanned from exposure. The half of his head where the hair was closely cropped had also darkened, his long thin unshaven cheeks bristled with stiff black hair, his

eyes glowed feverishly. Leaning on the handrail, he gazed fixedly at the dark blue water below, lapping the high sides of the ship, and from time to time he spat down into its depths.

# ASH WEDNESDAY

The grey winter Moscow day grew dark, the gas lit up coldly in the lamps, warmer lights shone from the shop windows—and Moscow's evening life started to kindle, rescuing one from the day's routine; the sleighs increased in number and sped along more gaily, the shaking overcrowded tramcars rattled more heavily—one could see in the dusk how green sparks scattered hissing from the electric wires—the black figures of pedestrians hurried with greater animation along the snow-covered pavements. . . . Every evening at this time my coachman drove me with a high-stepping trotter—from the Red Gates to the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour; she lived near by there; every evening I took her to dine in the Prague, the Ermitage or the Metropole, then after dinner to theatres or concerts, and after that to the Yar or the Stryelna. . . . How it would all end, I never imagined and tried never to think about; that would have been useless, just as it was to talk to her about it; she always changed the subject whenever our future was so much as mentioned. She was enigmatic, incomprehensible to me, and our relationship too was strange—we had never become really intimate with each other; something held me the whole time in an unbroken tension, in a painful state of foreboding—and none the less I experienced indescribable joy for every hour I spent with her.

She was studying for some reason a university course,

and occasionally, though not often, went to lectures. I once asked her why she went at all. She shrugged her shoulders: "Why does one do anything in the world?" Do we understand our own actions? Apart from that, history interests me. . . ." She lived alone—her father, a widower, lived in retirement at Tver; he was a cultured man of a well-known merchant family, and like many people of that kind he made a hobby of collecting things. In the house facing the Saviour's Cathedral she had taken a corner flat on the fifth floor, for the sake of its view over Moscow—only two rooms, but spacious ones and attractively furnished. In the first one a broad Turkish divan occupied a lot of space, and there was an expensive miniature piano on which she constantly practised the slow beautiful trance-like opening of the "Moonlight Sonata"—but only the beginning; on the piano and on the table under the mirror stood masses of flowers in cut-glass vases—I ordered fresh ones to be delivered to her every Saturday—and when I came to her on a Saturday evening, I used to find her lying on the sofa, over which for some unknown reason hung a portrait of the bare-footed Tolstoy; she would stretch out her hand in a leisurely way for me to kiss, greeting me absent-mindedly: "Thank you for the flowers. . . ." I brought her a box of chocolates, some new books—Hoffmansthal, Schitzler, Tetmayer, Pshybushevsky—and received the same "thank you" and the same warm out-stretched hand; sometimes she told me to sit near the sofa without taking off my coat; "I can't understand why," she would say thoughtfully, looking at my beaver collar—"but it seems to me nothing can be more agreeable than the smell of fresh winter air which one brings into a room from outside. . . ." It was

as if she really needed nothing, neither flowers nor books nor dinners nor theatres, nor suppers on the outskirts of the town, though she liked some flowers better than others, always read all the books I brought her, finished a whole box of chocolates in one day, at our dinners and suppers ate no less than me, loved regional food and fish soup, juicy grouse cooked in well-fried sour cream; sometimes she said: "I don't know how people don't get sick of it, dining every day, eating suppers. . . ." but she herself dined and supped with a truly Muscovite appreciation of good food. Yet her main weakness was for smart clothes, velvet, silk and expensive furs. . . .

We were both rich, healthy, young and so strikingly handsome that in the restaurants and concert halls people used to stare at us. I, coming from the Penza province, was handsome with a warm southern beauty, I was even "indecently handsome", as a celebrated actor once said to me; he was a monstrously fat man, a tremendous eater and very wise—"What the devil are you, a Sicilian?" he droned in a sleepy voice; indeed I had a lively southern temperament, always happy and smiling, and ready to enjoy a good joke. But in *her* beauty there was something Indian or Persian; a skin like dark amber, magnificent hair, almost sinister in its luxuriant blackness, soft and glossy brows, like dark sable fur, coal-black eyes; her alluring mouth with its velvety crimson lips was bordered by a shady streak of dark down; when she went out in the evening she very often wore a pomegranate-coloured velvet dress and slippers with gold buckles (but she went to lectures like a simple student, and lunched for thirty kopecks in a vegetarian restaurant off the Arbat); and as much as I was inclined to be talkative, light-hearted and gay, so was she disposed to thoughtful silence; her

mind was never idle, she always seemed to be absorbed in thought; lying on the sofa with a book in her hand, she would often let it drop and gaze questioningly in front of her; I saw this happen sometimes when I came to her during the day, because every month there were three or four days when she did not go out at all but lay all day on the sofa at home and read, compelling me also to sit on the chair next the sofa and read in silence.

"You're terribly loquacious and restless," she said, "do let me finish my chapter. . . ."

"If I hadn't been loquacious and restless, perhaps I should never have known you," I answered, reminding her of how we first met. That had happened in December, I went by chance to the Artists' Club to hear a lecture by Andrei Byely, who intoned it quaintly, hopping and dancing about the platform; I became so convulsed with laughter that she, who happened to be sitting in the chair next to mine, first looked at me with some surprise, then burst out laughing also; this gave me confidence to speak to her at once and share a joke.

"That is so," she said, "but all the same, do keep quiet for a bit, read something, smoke a cigarette. . . ."

"I can't be silent! Don't you realize how strongly I love you? You don't love me?"

"I realize it. As for my love, you know very well that apart from father and you, I have no one in the world. In any case you are my first and my last. Does that mean nothing to you? But enough—one can't read when you're here, so let us drink tea. . . ."

I rose, boiled the water in the electric kettle on the table behind the sofa, took out of a walnut cabinet, standing in the corner, cups and saucers, saying whatever first entered my head:

"Did you finish reading *The Flaming Angel*?"

"I finished looking through it. Such high-flown language that one really felt ashamed to read it."

"And why did you suddenly leave the Chaliapin concert yesterday?"

"I was in a bad mood. And then I don't really care for that flaxen-haired old Russia."

"There's always something you don't like."

"Yes, there are many things. . . ."

"What a strange love!" I thought, looking out of the window while the water was coming to the boil. The scent of flowers filled the room and she was for me part of that scent; through one window I saw stretched out below a wide view of a snowy dove-coloured Moscow; through the other, on the left side, one could see part of the Kremlin; just opposite, somehow disproportionately near, loomed the white outlines of the too new enormous Saviour Cathedral; its gilded dome reflected like blue specks the jackdaws which continually hovered round it. . . . "Strange town!"—I said to myself, thinking of the Hunters' Row, Iverskaya, of St. Basil's Church—St. Basil's—and then the Italian cathedral—and something Kirghiz about the cruel sharp towers on the Kremlin walls. . . ."

When I arrived in the dusk, I sometimes found her on the sofa wearing nothing but her silk robe trimmed with sable—"inherited from my Astrakhan grandmother," she said: I sat down beside her in the half-darkness; without turning on the light, and kissed her hands and feet, her wonderfully smooth body. . . . And she offered no resistance but remained silent. I constantly sought her warm lips—she yielded them to me, breathing more rapidly, but still silent. When she felt that I was already

losing my self-control, she pushed me away, sat up, and without raising her voice, asked me to turn on the light; then she went out into the bedroom. I lit up the room, sat down on the revolving stool in front of the piano and gradually came to myself, cooled down from that feverish excitement. Within a quarter of an hour she emerged from the bedroom fully dressed, ready to go out, calm and collected, as if nothing had happened just before:

"Where are we going? To the Metropole, I suppose."

And again we spent the whole evening talking about irrelevant things. Soon after our friendship began, she had said to me when I spoke of marriage:

"No, I should be no good as a wife—no good at all. . . ."

That did not dash my hopes, "We shall see!" I said to myself, hoping that she would alter her decision with time, and I spoke no more of marriage. Our incomplete intimacy struck me sometimes as unbearable—but there again—what could I do except wait and hope? Once, sitting beside her in the dark evening stillness, I clasped my head in both hands:

"No, this goes beyond my powers! Why, what makes you torture me and yourself so cruelly?"

She said nothing.

"Surely this is not love, not love. . . ."

She calmly answered through the darkness:

"Maybe. Who knows what love is?"

"But I know!" I exclaimed. "And I shall wait till you learn what love is, and happiness!"

"Happiness, happiness. . . . Our happiness, my friend, is like the water in a drag-net; if you pull it, it swells, and if you draw it out—there's nothing left."

"Who said that?"

"That is what Platon Karataev said to Pierre."

I waved my hand:

"Ah, we've had enough of all that oriental wisdom!"

And again we talked about other things the whole evening—about the new production at the Arts Theatre, Andreyev's latest story. . . . Again it was enough for me to sit close to her in the swiftly running sleigh, holding her round her smooth fur coat; then I entered the crowded restaurant with her while the orchestra played the march from *Aida*, ate and drank side by side with her, listened to her slow voice, looked at her lips which I had kissed an hour before—yes, kissed, I said to myself with enthusiastic gratitude as I looked at them, at the streak of dark down above them, at her pomegranate-coloured velvet dress, at the cast of her shoulders and the oval curve of her breasts, breathing in the slightly spicy scent of her hair, and thinking: "Moscow, Astrakhan, Persia, India!" In the restaurants outside the town, after supper, in a crescendo of noise and thickening tobacco-smoke, she, also smoking and rather intoxicated, would lead me sometimes into a private room, ask for gypsies to be called for, and they would pour in with deliberate clamour and jaunty nonchalance; in front of the choir stepped an old gypsy, with a guitar strung from a blue ribbon across his shoulder, dressed in a braided Cossack coat; his face was grey like a drowned man's and his head as bare as a billiard ball; behind him followed a gypsy woman singer with a low forehead under a pitch-black fringe. . . . She listened to the songs with a peculiar languid smile. . . . At three or four o'clock in the morning I brought her home; in the entrance I kissed her wet fur collar, closing my eyes with happiness, and in a kind of exalted despair I drove back to the Red Gates. And

tomorrow and the day after, it would be the same thing. I thought—the same torture and the same joy. . . . But what of that!—at least it was happiness, great happiness!

Thus passed January and February; Shrovetide came. On Shrove Tuesday she told me to come to her at five o'clock in the evening. I arrived, and she met me already dressed in a short Astrakhan fur coat, an Astrakhan cap and black felt boots.

"All in black!" I exclaimed, entering, as usual, in high spirits.

Her eyes were affectionate and mild.

"Well, tomorrow is Ash Wednesday," she answered, taking out of her muff and giving me her hand in a black kid glove. "Lord and master of my life. . . . Would you like to go to the Novodyevichy convent?"

I was surprised, but hurriedly answered:

"Well yes, I should like to go!"

"After all these night-clubs," she added. "Yesterday morning I went to the Rogojsky cemetery. . . ."

I was even more surprised.

"To the cemetery? What for? It's a well-known sectarian place."

"Yes, sectarian. Russia before Peter the Great! I saw the funeral of a certain archbishop. And just imagine it; the coffin was made from one solid block of oak, like in ancient times; they wore golden brocade as thick as embossed gold, the dead man's face was covered with a transparent white cloth sewn over with thick black letters—it was beautiful and terrible. And deacons stood round the coffin with metal cherubims and triple candles."

"How do you know all that about metal cherubims

and triple candles?"

"You really don't understand me."

"I didn't know that you were so religious."

"It's not just being religious. It's a mystery to me. . . but for instance I often visit the Kremlin churches in the mornings or the evenings, when you don't drag me off to restaurants, and you never even suspected that. . . . As I said—you should have seen the deacons. Like ancient monks! And choirs in both aisles, tall powerful men in long black kaftans, singing, echoing, while one choir caught up the refrain from the other—and they all sang in unison and without a single sheet of music. And the grave was lined with bright green fir tree branches, and outside the frost and sunshine, dazzling snow. . . . No, of course you don't understand that! Let us go. . ."

It was a peaceful sunny evening with hoar-frost on the trees; jackdaws, with a nun-like look, chattered in the stillness on the brick-red monastery walls, from time to time the bells pealed out a melancholy chime. Our feet crunching through the snow, we entered the gates, walked along snow-covered paths to the cemetery—the sun had only just set, it was still light, the frosted branches like grey coral were wonderfully outlined against the gold enamel of the evening sky, and those lamps which never went out, placed over some of the graves, burned mysteriously around us with their calm sad little flames. I followed her, tenderly watching her steps and the small star-shaped tracks which her new black boots left in the snow—suddenly she turned round, aware of my feelings:

"Certainly you love me!" she exclaimed with quiet surprise, shaking her head.

We paused by the graves of Ertel and Chekhov. Holding

her hands in her lowered muff, she gazed fixedly at the Chekhov memorial tomb, then shrugged her shoulders:

"What a revolting mixture of tawdry Russian style and the Arts Theatre!"

It was growing dark and freezing; we slowly passed out of the gates to where my Fedor was sitting meekly on the carriage box.

"Let us drive a little longer," she said, "then go to Yegorov's to eat our last pancakes. . . . Only don't drive too fast, Fedor, do you hear?"

"I hear."

"Somewhere on the Ordynka is a house where Griboyedov lived. Let us try to find it. . . ."

And so we drove to the Ordynka, explored at length various side-streets with gardens and found Griboyedov Street; but who could show us in which house Griboyedov had lived?—there was not a single passer-by, and which of them had any need to know about Griboyedov? It was long ago quite dark, the lit-up windows glowed rosily through the frosted trees. . . .

"The Martha-Mary Convent is also near by," she said.

I laughed.

"Yet another convent?"

"No, I just wanted. . ."

The ground floor of Yegorov's inn in Hunters' Row was full of ragged cab-drivers in thick coats devouring mountains of pancakes, covered with masses of butter and sour cream; the room was steamy like a Turkish bath. In the upper rooms, also very warm, with low ceilings, old-fashioned merchants were drinking iced champagne with boiling hot pancakes and fresh caviare. We passed into the second room where in a corner a

little lamp was burning in front of a dark ikon of the Three-handed Virgin; we sat down on the black leather sofa in front of a long table. . . the down on her upper lip was touched with hoar frost, her amber cheeks were flushed and pink, her dark eyes merged with their black pupils—I could not stop staring with rapture at her face. Taking a handkerchief out of her scented muff, she said:

"Good! Down below are savage peasants, and here are pancakes with champagne and the Virgin with three hands. Three hands! Surely that is like India! You can't understand all this Moscow as I do!"

"I can, I can!" I answered. "Now let us order a strong meal."

"How do you mean 'strong'?"

"Don't you know, 'so spoke Prince Yury Dolgoruky to Prince Seversky,' 'Come to me, brother, to Moscow,' and ordered a strong meal."

"How good! And that Russia only survives now in a few northern monasteries—and in the singing of church choirs. Not long ago I visited the Zachatevsky monastery —you can't imagine how divinely they sing there! But at Chudovo the singing is even better. Last year I often went there during Holy Week. Ah, how wonderful it was! Everywhere puddles, soft caressing air, melancholy and at the same time that feeling of one's own country, of its deep-rooted traditions. . . . All the cathedral doors stand open, all day long the country people move in and out, all day services continue. . . . Oh, I shall go away somewhere to a convent, to the remotest, most solitary place, in Vologda or Vyatka."

I wanted to say that then I too would go away or murder someone in order to get exiled to Sakhalin; I

lit a cigarette in forgetful agitation, but a waiter in a white tunic and trousers with a pink sash came hurrying up and politely reminded me:

"Excuse me, sir, smoking is not allowed here."

And he quickly continued, with peculiar officiousness:

"What would you like with your pancakes? Some herb wine? Caviare or smoked sturgeon? For discriminating people we have exceptionally good sherry. . . ."

"Yes, some sherry," she exclaimed, delighting me by her cheerful talkativeness, which did not leave her the whole evening. But I already listened rather absent-mindedly to her words. With a mild glow in her eyes she was saying:

"I so adore Russian chronicles, Russian folk-lore, that I go on reading over and over again everything that really appeals to me till I know it by heart. 'There was on Russian soil a town called Moor, ruled by a pious prince called Paul. And the devil sent a flying snake to tempt his wife. And this snake appeared before her in beautiful human form. . . .' "

I jokingly made round eyes at her:

"Oh, how terrible!"

She went on without listening:

" 'Thus she was tested by God. When the time drew near for her to die, the prince and princess prayed to God to take them to Him on the same day. They agreed to be buried in one coffin, and they ordered two gravestones to be carved in one block. And they both at the same time put on monastic dress. . . .' "

Again my absent-mindedness turned into surprise and even alarm; what was the matter with her lately?

And that evening when I drove her home, not at the usual time, but at eleven o'clock, she suddenly detained

me, saying good-bye at the entrance, after I had already stepped back into the sleigh:

"Wait. Come to fetch me tomorrow evening not later than ten. Tomorrow they are doing a cabaret show at the Art Theatre."

"Well," I said, "do you want to see that cabaret?"

"Yes."

"But surely you said you know nothing more vulgar!"

"I still don't. But I want to go all the same."

Mentally I shook my head—what a lot of caprices, Moscow whims!—but I answered cheerfully:

"All right!"

At ten o'clock on the following night, I got out of the lift, opened her door with my key, and paused for a moment in the dark entrance hall; her rooms were unusually bright—everything was lit, the chandeliers, the candelabra beside the mirrors and the tall lamp under the transparent shade next the sofa; and from the piano came the sounds of the opening bars of "The Moonlight Sonata"—they kept on rising, then dying away, sometimes challenging sounds, sometimes dreamily, pensively sad. I slammed the hall door—the music stopped, and I heard the rustle of a dress. I went in—she was standing upright and somewhat theatrically alongside the piano, wearing a black velvet dress which made her look slimmer; she was resplendent in her festively arranged black hair, the swarthy amber of her naked arms and shoulders, showing the tender full beginning of her breasts; diamond earrings sparkled over her lightly powdered cheeks, her velvety black eyes vied with the crimson velvet of her lips, from her temples shiny black curls twined in semi-circular ringlets to her eyes, giving her the air of an eastern beauty out of some picture in folk-lore.

"So if I were a singer on the stage," she said, looking at my bewildered face, "I should respond to the applause with amiable smiles and graceful bows to right and left, and would carefully, though unnoticeably, push away the train with my foot, in order not to step on it. . . ."

At the cabaret performance she smoked a lot and kept on sipping champagne, watching the actors attentively as they rendered with bold exclamations and repartee something that tried to be French; the large white-haired Stanislavsky with his black eyebrows, the thick-set Moskvin with pince-nez on his trough-shaped face, both fell back with such deliberate conscientious gravity as they performed the final reckless "Can-can" in front of an audience roaring with laughter. Later Kachalov came up to us, pale from drink, holding a glass in one hand; heavy drops of sweat stood on his forehead over which hung a shaggy lock of flaxen hair; he raised his glass and looking at her with an assumed air of gloomy desire he boomed in his deep actor's voice:

"Virgin Empress, Queen of Shamakhan—to your health!"

She slowly smiled and clinked glasses with him. He took her hand, staggered drunkenly towards her, and almost fell over. Recovering his balance, he compressed his lips and stared at me:

"And who is that handsome creature? I hate him."

Then a barrel-organ started to creak and grind out a jerky polka—the eternally hurrying, smiling little Soolerjitsky came gliding towards us, bowed with courtly politeness and murmured hastily:

"Allow me to invite you for the polka."

She rose smiling, and with her graceful short steps, glittering in her earrings, her black dress and her bare

shoulders and arms, she accompanied him to the central place between the tables, followed by admiring glances and applause, while he, throwing back his head, shouted:

"Faster, faster, come along. Dance the polka with me now!"

At three o'clock in the morning she stood up, and put her hand over her eyes. As we put on our coats she looked at my beaver hat, smoothed my beaver collar, and walked into the hall, remarking half-seriously and half joking:

"Handsome indeed. Kachalov was right. . . . A snake in human form."

On the way home she was silent, averting her head from the bright moonlit snow which was blowing in our faces. The full moon was diving through clouds above the Kremlin—"like a shining skull", she said. It struck three from the Spasskaya tower—she spoke again:

"What an ancient sound, like reverberating tin and cast-iron. It made exactly the same sound in the fifteenth century. And in Florence when I heard a bell like that, it reminded me of Moscow. . . ."

When Fedor stopped at the entrance, she murmured in a lifeless voice:

"Let him go. . . ."

Amazed—she had never let me come up to her at night—I said confusedly:

"Fedor, I'll go home on foot. . . ."

And we silently went up in the lift, emerged into the warm silent flat where the heating apparatus was gently throbbing. I helped her out of her fur coat covered with slippery snow; she drew the damp fluffy shawl from her head, dropped it on my arm and hurried into the bedroom, her silk petticoat rustling as she walked. I undressed

and sat down on the sofa, my heart sinking as if I stood on the brink of a precipice. I could hear her steps through the open door of the lit-up bedroom, and how, catching on her hair pins, she pulled her dress over her head. . . . I got up and went to the door; she was standing with nothing on except her swansdown slippers, her back towards me, combing with a tortoiseshell comb in front of the mirror the black locks of hair which fell in front of her face.

"So he kept on saying that I think very little about him," she exclaimed, throwing the comb on to the mirror-stand, and thrusting her hair back she turned towards me. "No, I was thinking. . ."

At dawn I felt she was moving. I opened my eyes—she was staring at me. I raised myself away from the warmth of the bed and of her body; she bent towards me and said in a low even voice:

"This evening I am going away to Tver. For how long. God alone knows. . . ."

She pressed her cheek to mine—I felt how her wet eyelash was quivering:

"I'll write to you about everything as soon as I arrive. I'll write all about the future. Good-bye, leave me now, I'm very tired. . . ." And she lay back on the pillows.

I dressed carefully, kissed her timidly on the hair, and tiptoed down the staircase which was already lit by a pale glow. I walked through the fresh sticky snow—the weather was fine, all was quiet and one could see clearly along the street, through which a smell of snow and baking bread rose up. I got as far as the Iverskaya church; inside it was burning and glittering with row upon row of candles; then I fell on my knees in the crowd of old

women and beggars amid dirty trampled-down snow; I took off my hat. Someone touched my shoulder. I turned my head; an unfortunate little old woman was looking at me, her face puckered up from sympathetic tears:

"Oh, don't be so upset, don't pine away so! It's a sin!"

The letter I received from her two weeks later was a short one—an affectionate but firm appeal not to expect to see her any more, not to try to search for her: "I shan't return to Moscow, for the time being I shall do penance, then perhaps I shall finally take my vows in a convent. . . . May God give you strength not to answer me—it is useless to prolong and add to our misery. . . ."

I fulfilled her plea. For a long time I frequented the most dissipated haunts, drank too much, and in every way sank lower and lower. Later on I gradually regained my balance—but I felt indifferent, no longer hopeful . . . . Nearly two years had passed since that Ash Wednesday.

In nineteen fourteen, on New Year's eve, on a sunny evening like that unforgettable one, I left the house, took a cab and drove to the Kremlin. There I entered the empty Archangel cathedral, stood for a long time in its half-light without praying, watching the subdued glitter of the ancient golden ikonostasis and the sepulchral monuments of the Moscow Tsars—I stood, as if waiting for something, in that peculiar stillness of an empty church, when one is afraid to breathe a sound. When I went out, I took a cab to the Ordynka, and drove at a walking pace through the dark side-streets with their gardens and lighted windows; as I drove along Griboyedov Street I could no longer restrain my tears from flowing. . . .

On the Ordynka I stopped the cab at the gates of the Martha and Mary Convent; there the courtyard was black with carriages, I could see the open doors of the small illuminated church, from which rose the tender, plaintive chanting of a choir of women's voices. For some unknown reason I was seized by an urgent impulse to go in. A doorman barred my way, whispering in an imploring tone:

"You can't go in, sir!"

"Why can't I? Isn't this an open church?"

"Of course, sir, that is true, but I must ask you not to go in, for heaven's sake, the Grand Duchess Elizabeth and Grand Duke Dmitri are in there now. . . ."

I thrust a rouble into his hand—he sighed deeply and let me pass. I had hardly entered when a procession bearing ikons passed out of the church, followed by the Grand Duchess, tall with a refined face, dressed in white with a white hood embroidered with a gold cross over the forehead, walking slowly and modestly with downcast eyes, holding a large candle in her hand. After her filed another long procession of novices or nuns, their faces lit up by candle flames—I did not even think who they were and where they were going. But somehow I watched them very attentively. And then one of the nuns walking in the middle suddenly raised her head, swathed in white, and shading the candle with her hand, her dark eyes stared into the distance, straight at me, so it seemed. . . . What could she see in the darkness, how could she feel my presence? I turned round and quietly went out of the gates.

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17. A. P. HERBERT
*The Secret Battle*

18. COMPTON MACKENZIE
*Extremes Meet*

19. HERBERT READ
*The Green Child*

20. ENID BAGNOLD
*The Loved and Envied*

21. WILLIAM PLOMER
*The Case is Altered*

22. ERIC LINKLATER
*Mr. Byculla*

23. L. A. G. STRONG
*The Brothers*

24. AUBREY MENEN
*The Prevalence of Witches*

25. ALFRED DUGGAN
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26. JAMES HANLEY
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27. SUSAN ERTZ
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28. ARNOLD BENNETT
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29. C. H. B. KITCHIN
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30. MARK RUTHERFORD
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31. WINSTON CLEWES
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32. E. W. HORNUNG
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34. OLIVER ONIONS
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35. OLIVER ONIONS
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36. HILAIRE BELLOC
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37. C. H. B. KITCHIN
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38. STELLA BENSON
*Tobit Transplanted*

*The Gentleman from San Francisco*

These stories are drawn from three collections of short stories by Ivan Bunin: *The Gentleman from San Francisco & Other Stories* (English translation 1922), *Grammar of Love* (1935), and *Dark Avenues* (1949). It has been said that the lyrical prose of this distinguished Russian author 'is in many ways an extension of his poetry', and in his Introduction William Sansom remarks: 'Like Proust, he deals with the past and the sensuous reconstitution of memory . . . he lets a simple framework of facts and feeling speak for itself . . . all [the characters] come most vividly to life.' And as Mr. Richard Hare commented, his stories 'are mainly centred in erotic episodes, which provide vivid and disquieting glimpses into the recent Russian past . . . in the short story Bunin's peculiar evocative gift, combined with his verbal economy and sureness of touch, finds an absolutely appropriate medium.' Many good judges consider 'The Gentleman from San Francisco' to be one of the most remarkable stories written this century, and the *Times Literary Supplement* called it 'an acknowledged masterpiece'.

IVAN BUNIN (1870-1953), was born in Voronezh, Central Russia. He left school at eighteen and travelled widely in Europe and Asia. After the Russian Revolution he emigrated to France, where he remained until he died. He had been awarded the Pushkin Poetry Prize in 1901 and in 1933 received the Nobel Prize for Literature. His reminiscences, *Memories and Portraits*, appeared in an English translation in 1950.

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